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Approaching Contemporary Cinematic I-Witnessing

Stefanie El Madawi

A thesis submitted to the University of
Huddersfield in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Huddersfield
with
the North of England Consortium for Arts and
Humanities
(NECAH)

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Notice of Publication:

An article entitled 'Telling Tales: Bearing Witness in Jennifer Fox's *The Tale*' was published in *Essay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies* in March 2020. The article was based on an early draft of my analysis of *The Tale* (Fox, 2018) in Chapter Two: Autofilmic Advocacy: Testimonial Remembering and Not Forgetting in Jennifer Fox's *The Tale* and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*.

Abstract:

In this thesis, I theorise Contemporary Cinematic I-Witnessing as a critical approach to the production and viewership of autobiographical experience on film. The analysis utilises autobiography, film, and adaptation studies to develop an ethical framework that considers the representation of autobiographical experience on film as a form of testimony. The research reveals the codes and conventions of the autobiographical 'I' on screen, to identify and interrogate the cinematic and empathic strategies that invite the viewer to bear witness. Fundamentally, Contemporary Cinematic I-Witnessing describes the unspoken agreement between subject and viewer, underpinned by a singular shared objective: to bear witness to the subjective truth of a life.

I argue that the subjective truth of autobiographical experience is conveyed on screen along a continuum of representation. The project begins by exploring self-reflexive film as self-witnessing, or *autofilmic testimony*, in the analyses of *Arirang* (Kim, 2011), *Tarnation* (Caouette, 2003) and *Blue* (Jarman, 1993), by mapping the first-person modes of address and documentary practices used in these films. The analysis moves on to explore *The Tale* (Fox, 2018) and *Persepolis* (2007) as narrative films that further constitute self-witnessing, whilst expanding the critical scope of autofilmic testimony to include the representation of traumatic memory and collective identity as advocacy. The thesis goes on to propose the cinematic adaptation of a literary autobiography as a secondary witnessing project, or *auteurbiography*, addressing questions of ethics, authorship, and fidelity. Using *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (Schnabel, 2007) to advance the notion of an ethical 'pact' between the filmmakers and the autobiographical subject, I argue that fidelity is crucial to the testimonial tone of auteurbiography. The analysis develops to consider issues of cinematic construction, creative authority, and relationality, exploring the hierarchies of authorship, ownership and representation that emerge throughout the adaptive process. The thesis concludes with a comparative case study of *Being Flynn* (Weitz, 2012) and *Julie & Julia* (Ephron, 2009), which exposes the limitations imposed by gender, genre, and commercial concerns, and the ways these issues can compromise the testimonial agenda of Contemporary Cinematic I-Witnessing.

Contemporary Cinematic I-Witnessing draws together and builds upon existing scholarship within autobiography and film studies, to advance an intersectional and interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of autobiographical and testimonial subjectivity on screen.

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And Glenn, my living dock leaf, my joy – in cups and everywhere – I could not have done this without you.

This, like everything, for Thea.

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Autobiography might be best thought of as a thing made out of a thing done.

Timothy Dow Adams

Approaching Contemporary Cinematic I-Witnessing

From *The Truman Show* (1998) to 'True Crime', *Pariah* (2011) to *Periscope*, the contemporary cultural landscape is replete with videographic attempts to bear witness to subjectivity on screen, with notions of autobiographical portraiture evolving in line with technological advancement and increased accessibility to filmic forms. In a recent special issue of *a/b Auto/Biography Studies* entitled 'What's Next? The Future of Auto/Biography Studies' (2017), a number of contributors address the evolution of critical inquiry to reflect the current preoccupation with visual media (Anderst; Chaney; Kennedy; Poletti, Tamboukou; et al.). Maria Tamboukou remarks upon "the visual turn" in self-reflexive practices, arguing that autobiographies in visual media offer "a feeling of existential proximity to the subjects" determined by the registration of "feelings and emotions" (2017: pp. 359-60) that images – of the body in particular – can permit. Leah Anderst comments on the autobiographical innovations occurring in documentary films, whereby contemporary filmmakers are using cinematic media to revise and reconstruct notions of selfhood on screen (2017: pp. 255-257). These contemporary insights are revealing of the communicative and affective capacity of visual autobiographical narratives, and the intersubjective engagement and interpretation they inherently invite. Traditionally, opportunities to see into the lives of others have been the remit of the self-reflexive prose of the autobiography, or the robust research of the biography, but the popularity of social media, streaming services and video sharing sites means that opportunities to see into others' lives, and equally be seen by others, are now broadly accessible. As a consequence, new reflections on what actually constitutes an autobiographical act abound, encompassing performance art, digital and graphic media, and, of course, film. Filmic forms predate many of the emerging visual media, but the visual turn has reinvigorated the longstanding interest in film as an autobiographical mode.

Film, as an audiovisual and referential apparatus, provides a multimedial platform for story telling that extends an "offer of seeing" (Corner 2008: p. 22) that can broaden the representational scope of written autobiographical narratives. The inherently multilayered signification in film allows for the simultaneous communication of experience and context that are intrinsic to our engagement with autobiographical accounts as real. However, the concept of autobiographical film remains critically contentious, with life-writing and film scholars alike debating the particularities of production and perception that constitute the visual autobiographical mode. In her seminal essay 'Eye for I – Making and Unmaking

Autobiography in Film' (1980), Elizabeth W. Bruss contends that there can be "no real cinematic equivalent for autobiography" (1980: p. 296), a view largely attributable to the belief that filmmaking is a necessarily collaborative industry, which is fundamentally discordant with the unilateral and self-reflexive authorship of the literary autobiographical 'I' (Lejeune, 1989). As both filmmaking practices and conceptions of what constitutes autobiography have evolved in the almost forty years since Bruss' essay was published, interdisciplinary interest in autobiographical film continues to grow. But, theorising cinematic autobiographical subjectivity, and who has the authority to depict it, requires a bilateral approach that considers not only the ways in which autobiographical subjectivity can be conceived, constructed and conveyed on film, but also the combined proposition of showing and telling that filmic iterations of autobiographical experience afford.

Emerging alongside the visual turn is a renewed interest in testimonial narratives, and the evaluation of the contemporary socio-political contexts in which they are produced and engaged (Gilmore and Marshall, 2019; Gilmore, 2019, 2017a, and 2017b; Snooks, 2017; Spallacci, 2017, et al.). The tenets of testimony are largely understood through legal and religious contexts, in which the subject is expected to deliver a truthful and verifiable account of an event or experience, to be received and/or judged by an impartial third party. However, the politics of testimony as a "self-representational act" (Gilmore and Marshall, 2019: p. 3) can be complicated by the contexts of trauma and crisis that require the subject to be their own eye-witness, and the cultural hegemonies that determine socio-political status. The recent #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo movements have brought testimonial discourse to the forefront of public consciousness, whereby the experiences of marginalised others, and their ability to attest to that experience, is reframed, marking a pivotal and urgent shift in the contemporary cultural context. In contemporary parlance, testimony establishes "a documentary, activist and commemorative politics around bearing witness" (Gilmore, 2017a: p. 307), bringing to the fore the intersectional ethics of engagement that testimonial witnessing entails.

Leigh Gilmore argues that "testimony is an increasingly central feature of contemporary life", which, consequently, makes it "crucial to parsing life narratives" (2017b: p. 307). The articulation of autobiographical experience, particularly in testimonial contexts, is motivated by the existential desire to be seen, heard and acknowledged, to share the reality of experience and enable others to conceive of the reported subjective experience as real. This involves an unspoken agreement between the subject and their chosen other, whereby the subject proposes to tell – or show – their subjective, experiential truth, and the other commits to receiving it as such. The empathy invited by such narratives is predicated on an acknowledgment of both similarities and differences, that enable the

reader or viewer to ‘feel with’ the subject’s experience from a distance that the textual boundary installs. But, when testimonial contexts are explicitly included within autobiographical narratives, both the ethical and empathic stakes of engagement are raised, because of the politics of witnessing that testimonial telling brings to the fore. When subjects bring experiential narratives to the public forum, the ethical and empathic parameters of engagement are determined by the formal and generic markers their texts contain. The use of visual media, particularly film, can allow subjects to capitalise on the dual offer of showing and telling these modes enable, to mobilise autobiography as testimony by presenting experience and testimonial contexts in tandem. Accordingly, the ways in which filmic autobiographical narratives are read and received as testimony are determined by the politics of witnessing initiated in and through the text, which signal its testimonial function and designate the viewer as witness.

The convergence of filmic autobiographical modes and testimonial disclosure constitutes an “act of performative telling” (Snooks, 2017: p. 398), which can invite the viewer to bear witness to subjective experience through the ethically motivated and empathically driven ‘contract’ the experiential narrative invokes. In this thesis, I theorise Contemporary Cinematic I-Witnessing as a dialogic approach to autobiographical subjectivity on film that foregrounds the “rhetorical proximity” of autobiography and testimony (Gilmore, 2001: p. 20). I identify the codes and conventions that characterise the autobiographical invitation to ethical and empathic engagement in filmic depictions of subjective experience along a continuum of representation. Using *Arirang* (Kim, 2011), *Tarnation* (Caouette, 2007), and *Blue* (Jarman, 1993), I begin by mapping first-person modes of articulation in self-made and self-reflexive films that encompass documentary practices, to identify film’s testimonial propensity from the documentary margins. I further address filmic forms of self-witnessing in the narrative films *The Tale* (Fox, 2018) and *Persepolis* (Satrapi, 2007), all within the autobiographical and testimonial scope of *autofilmic testimony*. The analysis then moves on to address the testimonial capacity of cinematic adaptations of literary autobiography as biographical projects of secondary witnessing, or *auteurbiography*. The adaptation of *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (Schnabel, 2007) highlights the ethics of fidelity, relationality, and creative authority, whilst *Being Flynn* (Weitz, 2012) and *Julie & Julia* (Ephron, 2009) expose the limits of gender, genre, and commercial appeal when in contention with the faithful representation of auto/biographical experience. The analysis traverses the construction of the audiovisual narrative, along with the layers of creative discourse involved, to evaluate the ethical imperative of the votive testimonial witnessing structure thus engendered, and identify the modes of production that can facilitate empathic engagement to instantiate an intersubjective pact.

In this thesis, I construct an analytical framework that combines distinct critical approaches from autobiography, testimony, documentary and film studies to evince the ethical and empathic efficacy of the autobiographical invitation on screen. I-Witnessing, as a purposely dialogic description, denotes both the production of a filmic narrative that depicts autobiographical experience, and the process of testimonial engagement as witness to cinematic iterations of the autobiographical invitation. The research reveals the features and function of the autobiographical invitation on film in terms of the recognisable conventions of its instantiation, the profilmic representation of the autobiographical subject, and the re/mediation of their unique point of view and voice. The language and grammar of subjective experience on screen is interrogated to theorise the testimonial capacity of cinematic forms with reference to authorship, ethics, strategies of empathy, referentiality, and relationality. Fundamentally, Contemporary Cinematic I-Witnessing is posited as a reciprocal and 'pactual' project between subject and viewer with a singular shared objective: to bear witness to the subjective truth of a life.

Literary Approaches to Autobiography and Testimony

Literary autobiography is predicated upon a "pact" between the author and the reader, a pact that holds as its central tenet that the author, narrator and protagonist must be "identical" in the production of a "retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence" (Lejeune, 1989: p. 4). The autobiographical pact underwrites the intersubjective relationship between writer and reader, the acceptance of which is founded on the conviction that the tripartite construction of the "autobiographical 'I'" (Lejeune, 1989) authorises the autobiographer's account as their own experience from their own point of view. Use of the personal pronoun 'I' signals self-reference within the text, which is verified by the inclusion of the author's "proper name" (1989: p. 20) in the paratext; the reader reconciles the 'I' in the text with the real author outside of the text through their acceptance of the pact's conditions, as autobiography is a "mode of reading as much as it is a type of writing" (Lejeune, 1989: p. 30). Consequently, autobiographical forms are reliant upon intersubjective engagement, whereby the referential labour is prompted by identifiable conventions of self-reflexive authorship.

Rockwell Gray claims in his article entitled 'Autobiography Now' (1982):

[t]o participate in the autobiographical mode, it is enough to reflect, to speak, or to act with an intention which is broadly self-narrative or self-revealing. Of course, to be judged at all, such intention must find some expression in a symbolic form, particularly in language and gesture.

(1982: p. 33)

Gray's characterisation underscores the inherent interrelation of product and process at the heart of an autobiographical act, in that to constitute autobiography, the narrative must divulge the author's self-referential intention and deliver a directive that implores the reader to engage with the narrative accordingly. Following Gray, Arnaud Schmitt confirms this assertion, highlighting the "three conditions" that identify autobiography (2018: p. 473): "an autobiographical act must be 'self-narrative or self-revealing', it must be regarded ('judged') as such and finally, the speaker must find a way to materialise symbolically her intent to speak about herself" (2018: p. 473). But, as Schmitt observes in his recent article, "autobiographical forms seem to be constantly branching off with new means of self-showing or self-telling" (2018: p. 470), meaning that 'judging' autobiography in alternative forms and new media entails greater referential labour in addition to the interpretation of the requisite intra-textual cues.

Schmitt explains that "we should consider autobiography both as an *invitation* (from the author) and as a *willingness* (on the reader's part)" (original italics, 2017: p. 129), which accords with the contractual nature of autobiography tendered by Lejeune. However, Schmitt asserts:

An autobiographical pact is not enough [...]. To work, autobiography must remain 'within this world', or least not lose sight of it and of the experience of the author. Since nothing in the text can ensure that it will be read accordingly, and since the author is to a certain extent powerless when it comes to keeping the reading of [their] text within reasonable limits, it is up to the reader to sustain the *referential effort*.

(original italics, 2017: pp. 97-8)

The reader's referential labour is imperative to the way autobiography 'works' and it is the autobiographer's responsibility to persuade their reader to sustain it, by inciting a readerly practice that Schmitt calls "emersion" (p. 126). Schmitt argues that, unlike "immersion", which "is characterized by being focused for a certain amount of time on the diegesis of the text", emersion requires "a process of *defocusing*, of remaining at the surface of a text", and "of redirecting your attention to the source of the narrative (the actual events), not the actual representation of the events" (original italics, 2017: p. 126). Ultimately, emersion guides the reader through the pragmatic pact of reading autobiography that champions the authority of the autobiographical 'I', to a phenomenological mode of engagement that privileges the experience of the author as real. This simultaneous and oscillating reference beyond the text to the authorial source and back to their textual representation validates the experience of the author, by cuing the continuous

reconciliation of their authorship (process) with the representative textual content (product).

Schmitt's emersion draws a parallel with a critical approach that Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub describe as "shuttle reading" (1992: p. xv), which is outlined in the foreword to their seminal collection *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992). For Felman and Laub, shuttle reading is the "necessary work of *textualization of the context*" that must complement "the very basic and critical demand for *contextualization of the text*" (original italics, 1992: p. xv); they further contend:

this shuttle movement [...] –the very *tension between textualization and contextualization*– might yield new avenues of insight, both into the texts at stake and into their context– the political, historical, and biographical realities with which the texts are dynamically involved and within which their particular creative possibilities are themselves inscribed.

(original italics, 1992: p. xv)

Where the autobiographical reading practices of emersion and testimonial shuttle reading overlap is in their acknowledgement of the world outside the text, the world in which the subject's experience occurred, and in which the subject does – or did – exist beyond the text. For self-referential narratives such as autobiography and testimony, the text and the context of its production are intrinsically linked, and therefore must be read in tandem.

Autobiography and testimony, therefore, share a "rhetorical proximity" (Gilmore, 2001: p. 20) in that both are formally self-referential accounts of lived experience that require a type of engagement that moves between the subject's narrative and the real-world context in which the subject exists. But, as Leigh Gilmore argues:

As a genre, autobiography is characterized less by a set of formal elements than by a rhetorical setting in which a person places herself or himself within testimonial contexts [...] in order to achieve as proximate relation as possible to what constitutes truth in that discourse.

(2001: p. 3)

Though the formal elements of autobiography help us to identify that what we are reading *is* autobiography, the inherently testimonial contexts of its self-referential production instantiate an ethical and intersubjective witnessing structure that is also predicated on a dialogic invitation to apprehend subjective truth. The politics of witnessing that testimony invokes is related to the way it functions, in terms of the way subjects use testimony to

articulate and “work through” trauma (LaCapra, 2014). Constructing testimony entails “being a witness to oneself” (1992: p. 75), but, as Laub explains, testimonial witnessing is mobilised by “the intimate and total presence of an *other*” whose purpose “is to be *unobtrusively present* throughout the testimony” to enable and receive the subject’s experiential account (original italics, Laub, 1992: pp. 70-71) with the aim to discern their experiential truth (p. 76). Essentially, autobiography and testimony’s proximate rhetoric is determined by the reciprocity of willingness – the autobiographer’s willingness to share experience, and the reader’s willingness to accept their invitation – that convenes the testimonial witnessing structure. Autobiographers invite their readers to bear witness to self-witnessing, as without the reader as witness, the narrative cannot achieve testimonial truth.

Self-made and self-reflexive films foreground the cognisance of form, rhetoric and modes of engagement that autobiography and testimony share, to manifest an autobiographical invitation that situates the viewer in the ‘intimate’ and ‘unobtrusive’ position of witness. It is on this basis that I argue autobiographical films constitute an audiovisual mode of self-witnessing testimony. As such, they instantiate a pactual witnessing structure that situates the willing viewer as testimonial – and literal – witness to the subjective truth of autobiographical experience on screen. Though engaging with autobiography is fundamentally “an ethical act” (Schmitt, 2017: p. 93), testimonial contexts – and the traumatic inflection they introduce – amplify the ethical imperative of the autobiographical invitation, as “narratives of witness”, according to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, “entwine the narrator, the story, and the listener/reader in an ethical call to empathic identification” (2010: p. 134). In order to explore the ways in which films are able to entreat ethical and empathic viewership, it is necessary to consider the ways in which autobiography and testimony have been rendered on film previously, to establish how audiovisual media can produce the requisite invitation to bear witness and how viewers engage with these forms.

Filmic Testimony and Autobiographical Film: Documentary Evidence

Filmic testimony is predominantly considered a documentary form, a view that has evolved in relation to historiography and Holocaust studies, and the use of documentary footage in legal settings such as the Nuremberg Tribunal and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) (see Rascaroli, 2017; Douglas, 2017, 2006, and 1995; Ball, 2013; Craps, 2010; Felman and Laub, 1992; et al.). These testimonial contexts afford documentary forms a type of evidentiary eminence, which developed as a result of perceived objectivity and direct representation. In *Issues in Contemporary Documentary*

(2009), Jane Chapman attests that “documentary is a discursive formation”, which “[creates] a rhetoric of immediacy and ‘truth’” based on the presentation of “first-hand experience and fact” (2009: p. 8). Chapman’s evaluation highlights documentary’s assertion of direct address and non-fictional status, which endow documentary films with an invitational rhetoric that accords with autobiographical and testimonial narratives.

Film and documentary theorist Carl Plantinga’s “critical realist” approach avers that “[documentary’s] epistemic claims can be rational and well justified” (2000: p. xii), defining documentary as “a subset of the broader category, nonfiction film and video”, which is “characterized by the assertive stance taken by the filmmaker(s) toward the world of the film” (Plantinga, 2010: p. xiii). According to Plantinga:

in the case of documentaries, filmmakers assert that the states of affairs they represent occur in the actual world, and audiences implicitly understand that since the film is identified as a documentary, its claims and implications should be taken as assertions rather than fictions.

(2010: p. xiii)

Documentary’s assertive stance establishes “an implicit contract” whereby the filmmaker tacitly proclaims “veridical or truthful representation” and the viewer accordingly “expects that the film will offer veridical representations” (p. xiv). This contract is the basis upon which the ethics of “truth-telling or truth-showing” in documentary are founded (p. xiv) – drawing a parallel with the autobiographical invitation and the aforementioned structure of testimony –positing documentary as a contingent mode of witnessing.

In today’s society, the ubiquity of digital and handheld camera devices – the likes of which are often found in smartphones and electronic tablets – and the presence of many digital platforms used for dissemination has led to a surge in personal documentary films, contributing to a “documentary boom”, which has emerged in tandem with the ongoing memoir boom of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Anderst, 2017: p. 255). Accordingly, the field of documentary studies has evolved in recent years, veering away from the founding sociological theories of the Griersonian tradition and the objective “creative treatment of actuality” (Grierson quoted in Chapman, 2009: p. 9) most associated with journalism and reportage, towards a less dogmatic doctrine that embraces documentary forms’ subjective potential. John Corner’s assertion that “the term *documentary* is always much safer when used as an adjective rather than a noun” echoes the tension between the terms autobiographical and autobiography, which arises primarily due to the terms’ synonymy for product and process. Moreover, Corner further reasons that “to ask ‘is this a documentary project?’ is more useful than to ask ‘is this film a

documentary?” (original italics, 2002: p. 258) favouring the explanation that documentary is an exercise “grounded in the logics of exposition” (Corner, 2008: p. 10) rather than a determinate generic label. However, in his chapter in Thomas Austin and Wilma de Jong’s 2008 edited volume *Rethinking Documentary*, Corner outlines the intricacy of documentary studies’ definitional quandary, citing aspects of “*form*”, “*subject matter*” and “*purposes*” as problematic and limiting lines of enquiry when considered in isolation (original italics, pp. 19-20). Corner instead points to the links between “*aesthetics*” and “*cognition*” (p. 20) in terms of documentary analyses that address “the organization of its visual design and the ‘offer of seeing’ it variously makes to audiences” (original italics, pp. 21-22). Corner suggests that the most productive critical inquiry must resist the reductive impulse and embrace the dynamism of documentary’s representational capacity.

Scholarship that theorises the self-referential capacity of filmic forms is similarly belligerent. Even the briefest survey of the available academic literature pertaining to autobiographical film reveals the complexity of its evaluation. The scholarship is unavoidably interdisciplinary, with analyses that encompass approaches from film and documentary studies, as well as the gamut of literary, sociological and psychoanalytic critique that informs life writing and auto/biography¹ studies. However, the breadth and diversity of the critical attention afforded autobiographical film can also breed ambiguity, most evident in the lack of a consensus regarding the terminology used in its discussion. Autobiographical films are broadly – and often interchangeably – referred to as filmic autobiography, autobiographical documentary, non-fiction film, essay film, self-portrait film and first-person film (Anderst; Gernalzick; Lebow; Lane; Plantinga; Rascaroli; Renov, et al.).² But, the variability of nomenclature is not indicative of entirely disparate conceptions of what actually constitutes autobiographical film, as will become clear.

In his book *The Autobiographical Documentary in America* (2002), Jim Lane assembles a collection of case studies that “expand the scope of what might be considered an autobiography and a documentary” (p. 5). For Lane, “Autobiographical documentaries are presented as both autobiography and documentary, where the filmmakers engage in a series of generic agreements” (p. 23). The convergence of documentary and autobiographical covenants is enabled by a stylistic shift away from the traditionally objective and non-interventionist remit of documentary filmmaking, towards a deliberately subjective and overtly referential approach. Lane charts the development of autobiographical documentary forms through the avant-garde and observational direct

¹ In this context, auto/biography refers to the combined study of autobiographical and biographical texts often combined under the umbrella term life-writing.

² The specificity of each of these terms is clarified where pertinent to the discussion.

cinema movements of the 1950s and 60s, to the pivotal influence of “the European experiments in reflexive film” in the works of French filmmakers Jean Rouch and Jean-Luc Godard in the early 1970s (pp. 12-17). For Lane: “Reflexivity extends to subjectivity, reference, and autobiographical forms by directing viewers’ attention to the autobiographical subject, who is a filmmaker” (p. 18). As Lane explains, for filmmakers “reflexivity enables the autobiographical discourse that inextricably brings together autobiographers, their medium, and their life story” (p. 18), in an initiative that simultaneously convenes and represents the filmmaker’s first-person perspective.

In the introduction to her collection of essays entitled *The Cinema of Me: The Self and Subjectivity in First Person Documentary* (2012), Alisa Lebow goes as far as to designate autobiographical documentaries “first person film”, which “goes beyond simply debunking documentary’s claim to objectivity” (p. 5). Lebow argues that “[i]n the very awkward simultaneity of being subject *in* and subject *of*, [first-person film] actually unsettles the dualism of the objective/subjective divide, rendering it inoperative” (original italics, 2012: p. 5). Though Lebow acknowledges that “cinema is a somewhat recalcitrant object” in terms of “its ultimate resistance to rules” (p. 2), she seeks to define an admittedly broad-ranging “category” of first-person films. Nevertheless, Lebow, like Lane before her, limits the discussion of the autobiographical mode in filmic pursuits to the confines of documentary forms, whilst she makes the significant distinction that: “[t]he designation ‘first person film’ is foremost about a mode of address” (2012: p. 1), which accords with Plantinga’s identification of documentary’s assertive stance.

In ‘To Act or to Perform: Distinguishing Filmic Autobiography’ (2006), Nadja Gernalzick contends that “filmic autobiography”, as “single-person produced personal cinema” is “a continuation of reflexive documentary film practice” (2006: p. 2), positing shared, identifiable codes and conventions such as “first-person filmic narrative”, “subjective camera technique” and the combination of “first-person voiceover with subjective camera perspective” as the dominant markers of the filmic autobiographical mode (pp. 2-3). Gernalzick’s observations attest to film’s capacity to reproduce the autobiographical ‘I’, with emphasis on the necessary embodiment of the subject and the cognate articulation of point of view. Similarly, for Lebow, first-person films “‘speak’ from the articulated point of view of the filmmaker who readily acknowledges her subjective position” (p. 1); however, she also argues that “first person film is not primarily, and certainly not always explicitly, autobiographical” (p. 2), with her critical approach allowing for the inscription of pluralistic and relational dynamics within the remit of first-person filmic ventures. This view is similar to that of Susanna Egan, for whom “film may enable autobiographers to define and represent subjectivity not as singular or solipsistic but as multiple and as revealed in

relationship” (p. 593), which advocates film’s aptitude for the representation of the inevitably relational construction of identity (Schmitt, 2017; Anderst, 2017; Smith and Watson, 2010; Eakin, 2008 and 1999; Miller, 2007; et al.). Though nuanced and nominally capricious, the media and methodological approaches that define self-reflexive filmic forms contribute to a constitutive ‘grammar’ of subjective films, the basis of which is rooted in documentary practices. Consequently, research pertaining to autobiographical film in its many guises must explore the utility of documentary and its creative concerns as the foremost filmic iteration of self-reflexivity and testimonial discourse.

Rather than contribute to the wealth of critical inquiry that attests to filmic forms of autobiography within the scope of documentary practices, this project begins by interrogating documentary “limit cases” (Gilmore, 2001), which highlight the flexible frontiers of self-made and self-referential filmic forms as a vehicle for self-witnessing. The designation *Autofilmic Testimony*, as the term implies, establishes the ways in which the autobiographical invitation is coded on screen, but also signals the testimonial remit of the narrative and the witnessing structure that manifests as a result. The analysis addresses the ways in which autofilmic testimony can include, and equally preclude, empathic strategies according to the subject’s self-witnessing agenda, and proposes the parameters of the viewership pact that posits the viewer as willing witness.

From its documentary limits, I then map the continuum of Contemporary Cinematic I-Witnessing to further critique cinematic constructions of self-witnessing, by looking beyond recognisably documentary practices to the markedly collaborative medium of the narrative film. I propose that the expansive repertoire of the “multilaminated” (Hutcheon, 2013: p. 21) cinematic medium can provide a representational platform for the complex and relational dynamics of autobiographical subjectivity and testimonial discourse beyond accepted conceptions of unilateral production. To further illustrate cinema’s representational capacity within the continuum, I move on to examine the ways in which the autobiographical invitation can be reproduced through cinematic adaptations of literary autobiographies. Taking the memoir as the originary act of self-witness, the analysis traces and interrogates the distance between the discursal levels of the adaptive process, to determine the modes of engagement and production that can transpose and transmit the testimonial truth of autobiographical experience on film.

The most obvious referential prompt within a literary autobiography is the autobiographical ‘I’, with filmic equivalents identifiable through their first-person modes of address and self-made, self-referential filmic narrative. The ways in which subjectivity is constructed in cinematic adaptations resemble reflexive documentary practices and the first-person

conventions of filmic autobiography, as discussed with reference to their documentary origins above. Gernalzick's aforementioned 2006 evaluation of filmic autobiography references Robert Montgomery's *Lady in the Lake* (1946) and *David Holzman's Diary* (1967) by Jim McBride as examples of cinematic projects that do not comply with the self-made and self-referential requisites of autobiographical construction, but which mimic and purposely imply a filmic equivalent of the autobiographical 'I'. Evidently, these conventions are by no means exclusive to autobiographical films, but have become familiar as representative of embodied subjectivity and interiority, in terms of their use to convey the primacy and perspective of a specific character within film narratives. Their use in adaptations, then, is a narrative strategy intended to convey subjectivity, but the reality of this subjectivity is understood in relation to the other paratextual and intertextual claims the film makes to reference its basis on autobiography. The overriding effect of these subjective audiovisual devices is to focus the viewer's attention, and to encourage empathy and identification with the depicted experience of the other on screen; Schmitt asserts, "since autobiography stems from experience, their [the author's] very peculiar experiential nature matters" (2017: p. 128) as this serves to interpolate the phenomenological experience of reading the text that "focuse[s] on the reality of one person" (2017: p. 122). If, as Barthes asserts, "the message is parametrically linked to its performance" (1994: p. 698), then the reinscription of the autobiographical 'I' and the preservation of the autobiographical subject's experiential perspective are paramount. Consequently, autobiographical adaptations must make use of available cinematic and narrative strategies in order to remediate both embodiment and point of view as intrinsic to the autobiographical invitation.

Adapting the Invitation

If the autobiographical invitation and the relative instantiation of the testimonial witnessing structure are contingent upon first-person accounts, how can films that are not self-reflexive invite viewers to bear witness to subjective truth? How is the autobiographical invitation adapted? What are the parameters for a viewership pact that can elide the increased distance between the subject and their autobiographical narrative? These are some of the key questions I address through the exploration of narrative films that transpose literary autobiographies from page to screen. My analysis posits that autobiographical adaptations can convene the testimonial witnessing structure outlined above, to promote the willing ethical and empathic engagement with cinematic subjectivity as representative of autobiographical experience. I also argue that the viewer is able to effectively overlook the necessary transmedial labour through emersive viewership that privileges the autobiographical subject, and their narrative, as real. The testimonial

context of autobiography as self-witness determines that the reader takes up the position of witness as receiver; therefore, the adaptation of an autobiography requires that the adapter begins from the position of willing witness, reading and receiving the autobiographer's narrative and accepting their invitation, before subsequently taking up the role of secondary witness who reissues the autobiographical subject's invitation in the adapted film. This process requires an ethical commitment to faithful representation that resists the auteurial impulse often evident in novel-to-film adaptations.

Adapting autobiographical narratives highlights the ethical imperative of fidelity, which dictates that the adaptation must strive to preserve the autobiographical subject's unique autobiographical invitation. But, the effect of fidelity within the context of cinematic I-witnessing is that the adaptation is equivalent to secondary witnessing. Adapters become "the catalysts – or agents – of the process of *reception*" (original italics, Felman, 1992: p. 213) by disseminating the testimony of the autobiographical subject on their behalf, and inviting others, as viewers, to bear witness. As a result, the adapter is essentially translating the autobiographical subject's invitation, which involves an especially ethical transmedial transposition of the autobiographical subject's self-witnessing narrative that can engender the intersubjective witnessing structure. In order to achieve this, the adapter must first accept the autobiographer's invitation to bear witness, by engaging with the text and the context of its construction, before they can reissue the autobiographical subject's invitation on screen; as Hutcheon confirms: "the adapter is an interpreter before becoming a creator" (2013: p. 84). The dialogic process of the acceptance, preservation and transposition of the autobiographical invitation amounts to what I call *pactual integrity*, which holds that the film text, and those involved in its production, resolve to tell the autobiographical subject's story from their subjective point of view, and to produce a cinematic narrative of witness that invites the viewer to engage with the film as testament to the real autobiographical subject's experiential truth.

Though the cinematic adaptation of autobiography places particular emphasis upon fidelity to the source text and the preservation of the autobiographical invitation, adapted texts are by their very nature "hybrid constructions", which, as Robert Stam contends, is a notion that "applies even more obviously to a collaborative medium like film" (2004: p. 4). The adaptation process involves numerous people, from the screenwriter and director, through to the actors, editors and cinematographers, all of whom are responsible for creating an audiovisual narrative that can place viewers "in the position of the witness who *sees and hears*" (original italics, Felman, 1992: p. 121) for themselves. Their aim is to focalise autobiographical experience, and recapitulate the real, without compromising the self-witnessing inflection of the subject's story. Nevertheless, we should consider the

adapted text as a “palimpsest”, in that it carries the residual traces of the source text(s) from which it is adapted, but also the creative and stylistic modulations of the director as auteur, inclusive of their overall duties as “manager” and “organizer” of their screenwriter, cast and crew (Hutcheon, 2013: p. 83), which I designate the *auteurial équipe*.³ The “collective authoriality” (Schmitt, 2017: p. 139) that arises due to the collaborative input of the auteurial équipe, as contributors to the production and remediation of autobiographical subjectivity on screen, is steered by the director who is “ultimately held responsible for the overall vision and therefore for adaptation as *adaptation*” (original italics, Hutcheon, 2013: p. 85).

The term auteur carries connotations of artistic authority and directorial dominance, which are potentially problematic in the context of autobiographical adaptations that are meant to convey the subjectivity of a specific other. Accordingly, what Andrew Sarris calls the “tension between the director’s personality and his material” (1962: p. 7) is a particular concern in the evaluation of adapted autobiographies, which I address in the conception of autobiographical adaptations as *auteurbiography*. *Auteurbiography* is my term for both the product and process of adapting a literary autobiographical source as tantamount to secondary witnessing. Firstly, the auteurial équipe must undertake a willing, ethical and empathic engagement with the source text, which equates to acceptance of the autobiographical invitation as outlined above in the discussion of literary autobiography. Secondly, the adaptation process entails the auteurial équipe’s extension of Schmitt’s emersion and Felman and Laub’s shuttle reading, in the oscillation between text and context that then leads to a literal, biographical exploration of the testimonial context. This stage of the adaptation process encompasses the research efforts made by the members of the auteurial équipe prior to production; the research is used to bring the context into the cinematic frame, informing the screenwriting process, decisions about setting, costume and casting, and the ways in which the subject should be embodied, or performed, on screen. Furthermore, this additional information expands the “scope” (Schmitt, 2017: p. 67) of the subject’s representation to effectively reduce the referential labour for the viewer. Finally, the director must then collate the auteurial équipe’s findings, as extrapolated through their metatextual investigative practices, towards the production of a cinematic representation of the reality of the autobiographical subject that corresponds with the source text.

³ I use the French term *équipe* to acknowledge the French origins of auteur theory, as well as for its synonymy for ‘team’, ‘crew’, and ‘personnel’, none of which seemed adequate in English.

Typically, adaptations must overcome expectations of fidelity, whereby the literary source “is granted axiomatic primacy and authority”; Hutcheon recognises that “the rhetoric of comparison has most often been that of faithfulness and equivalence” (2013: p. 16). This kind of “fidelity criticism”, according to Brian McFarlane, “depends on a notion of the text having and rendering up to the (intelligent) reader a single, correct ‘meaning’ which the film-maker has either adhered to or in some sense violated or tampered with” (1996: p. 8). The expectation of fidelity as a critical framework is considered limiting at best and reductive at worst, but the persistent comparative rhetoric is intrinsic to evaluations of adaptations. However, as Thomas M. Leitch explains, thinking of adaptations in terms of dependency upon their literary sources

inevitably impoverishes them because it reduces them to the single function of replicating (or, worse, failing to replicate) the details of that single source text [...]. Taking fidelity as the decisive criterion of an adaptation’s value is tantamount to insisting that it do the same job as its source text without going outside the lines that text has established.

(2007: p. 30)

Leitch makes his point with reference to adaptations of novels, which largely resist a singular, prescriptive reading; but, to take up his idea of the predetermined ‘job’ of the source text, some autobiographies *do* have a specific testimonial function that is expedited by the ‘lines’ – or requisite factual parameters – of the form. In the context of autobiographical adaptations then, there is an ethical obligation to not only preserve the autobiographical invitation, but to reproduce the assertive stance of the subject’s self-witnessing narrative that determines the mode of reading – or viewership – required.

Many cinematic adaptations signal their adapted status through “seemingly simplistic” and “familiar” paratextual truth claims like “based on a true story” (Hutcheon, 2013: p. 18), which purposely prompt the comparative rhetoric of fidelity criticism and the expectation of veridical truth associated with non-fiction films, as mentioned above. Referencing the source in this way acknowledges the dialogic, intertextual relationship between the source and the adapted text, whilst simultaneously positing a subtle and indistinct disclaimer. For this reason, ‘based on’ is a caveat without a quorum, which allows the adaptation to capitalise upon its claim to truthful representation, whilst it somewhat ironically frees it from the absolute assertion of faithful and direct replication. However, autobiographical adaptations require more than a precedent title card or marketing message as surety that the film narrative operates within the same “horizon of expectations” (Jauss, 1970: p. 13) as its source. Though the films included in Section Two of this study do incorporate an

equivalent paratextual proposition to buttress the cinematic invitation to bear witness, it is the use of recognisably subjective conventions and the ubiquity of the representation of the subject within the cinematic discourse that stimulates emersive viewership, and the necessary referential labour that can ensure that the viewer does not “*lose sight of*” (original italics, Schmitt, 2017: p. 97) the real autobiographical subject.

Emersive viewership, and the referential resolution needed to overlook/subtend the disparate levels of discourse between the autobiographical source text and the adapted film requires a substantial effort on the part of the viewer. Director and film theorist, Sergei Eisenstein’s “montage principle” (1970: p. 37) offers a useful conceptual framework that helps to articulate the viewer’s intuitive compression of the multi-layered and collaborative creative process – as is required for emersive viewership – in his description of the intersubjective creative “output” of what he calls “the spectator” (1970: p. 37). For Eisenstein:

[I]t is precisely the montage principle, as distinguished from that of *representation*, which obliges spectators themselves to create, and the montage principle, by this means, achieves that great power of inner creative excitement in the spectator which distinguishes an emotionally exciting work from one that stops without going further than giving information or recording events.

(original italics, 1970: p. 37)

Considered within the context of auteurbiographical adaptations, the ‘inner creative excitement’ as Eisenstein puts it, is the cognitive referential labour that occurs during the phenomenological reading of an autobiographical text, which can be made manifest in emersive viewership of the adapted film assuming that the cinematic narrative appropriately incites the viewer’s reconciliatory effort. As an example, Eisenstein offers:

[B]etween the representation of an hour on the dial of a clock and our perception of the image of that hour, there lies a long chain of linked representations of separate characteristic aspects of that hour. [...] [P]sychological habit tends to reduce this intervening chain to a minimum, so that only the beginning and the end of the process are perceived.

(Eisenstein, 1970: p. 22)

The “aggregation” that occurs effectively reconciles the disparate ‘characteristic aspects’ of the representation and the object and/or concept it represents, which constitutes the cognitive “‘mechanics’ of the formation of an image” (Eisenstein, 1970: p. 21). Emersive

viewership, as a comparable subconscious exercise, enables the viewer to perceive the real autobiographical subject through their cinematic representation, and to ultimately engage with their autobiographical invitation in spite of the multi-levelled adaptation process. In other words, the viewer will accept the subject and their depicted experience on screen as the autobiographical subject's as long as the depicted experience prompts them to do so.

Approaching Empathy

Theorising cinematic I-witnessing requires a review of the empathic engagement often taken for granted in narratives of witness. Though narrative empathy is largely hypothesised in relation to fictional texts, as seen in the work of Suzanne Keen (2006; 2013), Nancy Snow (2000), and Anderson and Anderson (2009), life-writing scholarship has recently begun to consider the prevalence of narrative strategies of empathy in an autobiographical context (Anderst, 2019 and 2015; Schmitt, 2017). Leah Anderst identifies the “tracks” (2015: p. 273) of narrative empathy in Doris Lessing and Alison Bechdel's life writing, across traditional literary and comic memoirs, arguing that autobiographical narratives can entreat empathic responses from readers at intra- and extra-textual levels. Anderst addresses the ways that relational dynamics and the embodied politics of autobiographical modes resonate with readers, providing productive “channels” (2015: p. 273) for empathic engagement and identification that operate within and through the narrative. Schmitt's phenomenological model posits empathy at the centre of autobiographical engagement, which, as mentioned above, is the result of sustained referential labour and the privileging of autobiographical experience as real (2017). In her most recent article, Anderst (2019) theorises documentary's empathic potential as an autobiographical mode in her evaluation of Marlon Riggs' *Tongues Untied* (1989); this reading interrogates narrative empathy, in contrast with her evaluations of the visual strategies of empathy in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home* (2006), which she frames as comparable with a more traditional written memoir (2015). Whilst Schmitt cites neurological research and the faculties of mirror neurons in his phenomenological approach to autobiography, making passing references to films, both Schmitt and Anderst stop short of reconciling the autobiographical invitation with film's largely uncontested capacity to elicit empathic and emotional responses.

Outside of autobiography and documentary studies, film scholars have long considered the affective aptitude of film. Often, discussions default to the use of terms like ‘identification’ and feeling ‘moved’ as emotions and feelings, which are easy to acknowledge, are far more difficult to define. Nevertheless, the fact that film is adept in

eliciting emotional responses in viewers is largely uncontested, with a broad spectrum of critique that offers a substantive insight into cinema's empathic proclivity. Berys Gaut offers a relatively simplistic distinction between identification and empathy, which holds that identification is "imaginative" (1999: p. 206), as a viewer must "*imagine* feeling what a person (or character fictionally) feels" (original italics, 1999: p. 206). Empathy, however, "requires one to share in the feelings one ascribes to [a person or character]" (p. 207) often mobilised in film by sequences of point-of-view shots and "expressive reaction shots" that enable viewers to envisage themselves in the character's situation (p. 209). In 'The Scene of Empathy and the Human Face' (1999), Plantinga expresses a preference for the term "character engagement" instead of identification, in agreement with Murray Smith, arguing that the notion of identification is "misleading" (p. 244) and "too confusing to be useful" (p. 287) in the evaluation of viewers' affective engagement with film. Empathy, on the other hand, "consists of a capacity or disposition to know, to feel, and to respond congruently to what another is feeling", which "may incorporate varied sorts of emotional experience" as opposed to a singular, discernible emotion (p. 245). Empathy then is both the aptitude and the process by which a viewer feels "congruent emotions" (p. 245) in response to film characters, prompted by engagement with the audiovisual narrative and the "viewing context" that can further condition affective responses (p. 248).

Greg M. Smith's "mood-cue approach" to filmic analysis also points to "emotion cues", which encompass "narrative situation, facial and body information, music, sound, *mise en scène*, [and] lighting", as "the smallest unit[s] for analysing a text's emotional appeals" (1999, p. 116). In addition to cues, Smith contends that "emotion markers" help viewers to sustain their "mood" or "predisposition toward expressing emotion" (p. 118), as sequences that do not elaborate upon the film's narrative arc, nor the "goal" of the protagonist, but serve to maintain the viewer's expectancy for emotional engagement and "encourage the mood to continue" (p. 118). For Smith, it is a film's organisation of both cues and markers that promote and sustain a viewer's mood in response to what they watch, which indicates the way that conventions of filmic narrative and construction can promote a particular affective purview.

This accords with Noël Carroll's observations that "some genres seem to traffic in certain specifiable emotions" and that "some genres also aim at arousing specific emotions in spectators as a condition of being an instance of the very genre in question" (1999, pp. 34-5). It is conceivable, indeed likely, then, that viewing a film with prior expectations for its content, as determined by generic labels and familiarity with the tendencies and tropes of said genre, can guide the way that a viewer approaches a film in the first place. Therefore, there is purchase in the contention that the deployment of specifically

subjective conventions, when pre-empted by the appropriate paratextual prompts (references to real people/name and genre distinctions such as documentary, etc.) can signal to a viewer that what they are watching is, and should be viewed as, representative of real, autobiographical experience. It is on this basis that I map the codes and conventions of cinematic I-witnessing, in terms of the way a film manifests a subject's autobiographical and testimonial invitation, to identify the ways in which they buttress and invoke ethical and empathic engagement.

It is important to acknowledge that empathic engagement is never guaranteed, as Keen points out in her evaluation of narrative strategies of empathy in prose: "Readers may and do sometimes respond indifferently to appeals to their feelings" (2011: p. 372). She goes on to explain that indifference does not necessarily indicate "incompetence", on the part of the author or the reader, rather that "it reflects differences in readers' dispositions and experiences" (2011: p. 32). Frames of reference and emotional capacity vary according to each person's individual character and experiential history, and atypical responses to narrative stimuli cannot be ruled out. However, films can prompt empathic engagement on numerous different levels (as outlined above), and my identification and analysis of the empathic strategies used in autofilmic testimonies and auteurbiographies throughout this thesis does not presuppose their universal efficacy. As Keen and others have suggested, empirical research into the ways in which empathy functions is needed, but this is beyond the scope of my project.

Roger Luckhurst contends:

Abject theories of the ethical and empathetic response to the pain of the other pour out of academic presses, all of which find little purchase in the brutal geo-politics of the contemporary world.

(Luckhurst, 2008: p. 213)

Though I recognise the limitations of overt identification with testimony in the body of this research, the witnessing model presented here acknowledges the intersectional politics of a globalised society, drawing on diverse examples of autobiographical subjectivity on film to address the complexity of self-reflexive practices and their theoretically cross-cultural empathic potential. Testimonial accounts inevitably reference traumatic experience, and traumatic contexts in turn affect the ways in which autobiographical narratives can be recalled and related as narratives. Consequently, my analysis aims to address the effects and implications of trauma, where relevant, but within the remit of the witnessing framework proposed. As a medium that can transcend geographical and cultural borders, film is capable of communicating both the similarities and differences in subjective

experience, but, as I hope becomes clear, is particularly proficient at presenting the shared tendencies of the human condition.

Overview of the Chapters

This thesis is divided into two sections, to mark the transition from evaluations of self-made and self-referential films to the analysis of filmic adaptations of literary autobiography. In Chapter One of the first section, documentary “limit cases” (Gilmore, 2001) are examined as filmic forms of self-witnessing that reveal and interrogate formal boundaries and documentary conventions in an autobiographical and testimonial context. The analysis primarily maps the parameters of autofilmic testimony in Kim Ki-duk’s *Arirang* (2011), Jonathan Caouette’s *Tarnation* (2003) and Derek Jarman’s *Blue* (1993), as contemporary examples of self-made and self-reflexive, audiovisual narratives of witness, to propose the intersubjective model that equates viewership with testimonial witnessing.

With the testimonial witnessing structure as an analytical framework, the analysis then develops the premise of autofilmic testimony in Chapter Two, to consider the representational and relational scope of cinematic I-witnessing in feature films. Jennifer Fox’s *The Tale* (2018) and Marjane Satrapi’s animated *Persepolis* (2007) demonstrate autofilmic testimony’s metonymic potential, and the advocacy that can be achieved through intra- and extra-textual tracks of empathy in autobiographical films. The two very different films under scrutiny in this chapter demonstrate the extended contextual capacity afforded by more traditional cinematic approaches, and the analysis gestures towards adaptive strategies that can mobilise the autobiographical invitation to bear witness within the multihanded industry of conventional filmmaking practices.

Section Two traces the degrees of separation between literary autobiography and the ethical and empathic adaptation of the autobiographical invitation from page to screen. Adaptation theory informs the analysis of the distinct levels of the adaptive discourse, to propose *auteurbiography* as a biographical endeavour that can – and should – preserve and promote an autobiographical subject’s unique invitation to instantiate emersive viewership as testimonial witnessing. Chapter Three offers Julian Schnabel’s 2007 adaptation of Jean-Dominique Bauby’s *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (1997) as the auteurbiographical prototype, identifying the responsibilities of the auteurial équipe in their collective role as secondary witness and the necessity of pactual integrity. The analysis addresses the source memoir, the screenplay, and the final film text, foregrounding issues of fidelity, authorship and embodiment in the remediation of vulnerable subjectivity, to

highlight the ethical and empathic imperatives of bearing witness to autobiographical experience.

The final chapter posits *Being Flynn* (Weitz, 2012) and *Julie & Julia* (Ephron, 2009) in a comparative case study, to critique the creative and cinematic boundaries of auteurbiographical adaptation. Chapter Four considers the referential responsibility inherent in relational auto/biographies, and concordant implications for their adaptation within a mainstream, Hollywood context. The effects of relationality, the 'star system', auteur status, and related hierarchies of ownership and authorship are considered alongside issues of fidelity, gender and genre, which highlight the ethical and empathic imperative of factual integrity. This chapter brings into relief the limits of auteurbiography to illustrate the margins of cinematic I-witnessing, and the issues of genre, auteurship and adaptive interpretation that can preserve, and potentially preclude the cinematic transmission of the autobiographical invitation.

Section One: Autofilmic Testimony

Autobiography is more tellable because its purpose is to unpack the chaotic narrative of one's experience, or, in other words, it is tellable because this is exactly its purpose: to make it tellable.

Arnaud Schmitt

2. Asserting the Testimonial I/Eye: Self-Witnessing as Autofilmic Testimony in *Arirang*, *Tarnation* and *Blue*

Autobiographical and testimonial films are largely perceived to be the remit of documentary forms, a view that is attributable to the “implicit contract” that documentaries construct between the filmmaker and the viewer, which is underpinned by the dialogic offer and expectation of “truthful representation” (Plantinga, 2010: p. xiv). The documentary contract echoes the invitational rhetoric of autobiography and testimony, installing the viewer as a willing witness to the events and experience conveyed on film. When the filmmaker becomes the subject of the documentary, the implicit contract invoked posits the viewer as witness to the filmmaker’s subjective truth, with the “offer of seeing” (Corner, 2008: p. 22) the film makes determined by the assertion of the filmic first-person perspective of the autobiographical ‘I’. My conception of autofilmic testimony in this chapter combines approaches from autobiography, testimony, and documentary studies to analyse the ways in which Kim Ki-duk’s *Arirang* (2011), Jonathan Caouette’s *Tarnation* (2007), and Derek Jarman’s *Blue* (1993) assert the autobiographical ‘I’ in their films to instantiate the testimonial witnessing structure, as outlined in the introduction. I transpose Gilmore’s notion of the “limit case” (2001) from life writing to documentary forms to argue that the films analysed in this chapter interrogate the generic boundaries of documentary, whilst they simultaneously capitalise on the conventions and assertions of subjectivity and reflexivity that documentary practices afford to convey the testimonial truth of autobiographical experience as a filmic mode of self-witnessing.

Self-witnessing is a dialogic process underpinned by an intersubjective agreement between a subject and a willing witness, much like the autobiographical pact between the autobiographical ‘I’ and the reader (Lejeune, 1989), as explained in the introduction. This proximate rhetoric (Gilmore, 2001) is predicated on the invitational dynamic of self-referential narratives, whereby the subject shares the subjective truth of lived experience, and the other willingly accepts their invitation to bear witness to that truth. The films I designate autofilmic testimony issue the invitation by making clear their self-made and self-referential status, with the subject-filmmaker using recognisable autobiographical and documentary conventions to convey the filmic narrative’s subjective and testimonial premise. Literary “narratives of witness” (Smith and Watson, 2010: p 134) entreat ethical

and empathic engagement that necessitates a concerted referential effort, which requires the reader to read the testimonial context of the narrative and the narrated experience as real (see Schmitt, 2017 and Felman and Laub, 1992). Autofilmic testimonies can reduce this referential and reconciliatory effort, through the combined offer of “truth-telling” and “truth-showing” (Plantinga, 2010: p. xiv) that documentary forms make, as mobilised by the perceived “immediacy” and factuality (Chapman, 2009: p. 8) of the documentary mode. The autofilmic testimonies I analyse in this chapter take advantage of the reflexive, discursive and evidentiary aspects of documentary practices to convene the testimonial witnessing structure, whilst simultaneously exploiting the creativity and flexibility that filmic media permit.

The autofilmic testimonies in this chapter demonstrate the ways that filmmaker-subjects use film as a vehicle for self-witnessing, and illustrate the ways in which film can capture the dimensions of autobiographical subjectivity on screen. My analysis of these films introduces key concepts such as performativity, empathy, relationality, embodiment, and voice, all of which inform the theoretical approach of Contemporary Cinematic I-Witnessing, and the construction of a filmic autobiographical invitation to testimonial witnessing. Beginning with *Arirang*, I address the ways in which Kim self-consciously invokes and resists the designation documentary as an assertion of creative and testimonial agency. Kim offers a complex and performative model of self-witnessing within his autofilmic testimony, which illustrates the multilateral empathic potential afforded by filmic media, and the flexibility of documentary practices for rendering subjective truth on screen. In *Tarnation*, Johnathan Caouette posits self-witnessing within a relational construction, situating subjectivity and autobiographical experience within a familial context. Caouette makes use of found footage and photographic images to ‘cite’ the memory work of testimonial telling and to assist with the referential reconciliation of the autobiographical ‘I’. The final film, *Blue*, is a particularly radical example of autofilmic testimony, in which Derek Jarman purposely obfuscates the embodiment of autobiographical subjectivity in a deliberately political gesture. In *Blue*, Jarman mobilises voice and entreats multiple strategies of empathy to manifest an autobiographical invitation that requires significant referential and reconciliatory effort. Collectively, the films in this chapter outline and interrogate the parameters of autofilmic testimony to determine film viewership as ethical and empathic testimonial witnessing.

Artistic Agency in *Arirang*

Kim Ki-duk is an award-winning and prolific South Korean screenwriter, director and filmmaker who, after a near-fatal accident on one of his film sets in 2008, embarked upon

a self-imposed three-year hiatus from the filmmaking industry. During this time Kim withdrew from society, taking up residence in an isolated cabin at the foot of the South Korean mountains, where he made an entirely self-produced and self-reflexive feature-length film entitled *Arirang* (2011). *Arirang* premiered at the Cannes Film Festival in 2011, dividing critics but ultimately winning the *Un Certain Regard* prize.⁴ The film documents Kim's solipsistic attempt to process the trauma of the accident, in a self-interrogatory, testimonial project constructed in his preferred creative medium, using a Mark II digital camera. Often identified as a documentary, Kim's film purposely interrogates the diametric relationship between fiction and nonfiction, whilst making use of recognisably documentary and first-person filmic practices to assert the autobiographical invitation to testimonial witnessing.

From the outset, the viewer is alternately given "fly on the wall" (Chapman, 2009: p. 10) and first-person subjective perspectives into Kim's daily routine, fashioned with a distinctly "raw documentary feel" through the use of "hand-held camerawork" (Chapman, 2009: p. 15) in the establishing shots. The close quarters of the simple cabin Kim inhabits are shown through a mounted camera from various fixed positions, and a sense of containment conveyed from Kim's first-person perspective as he navigates his sparse surroundings. These subjective techniques foster "intimacy", which for Schmitt "corresponds to what is very personal and private" (2017: p. 151) in autobiographical narratives. This intimacy is further realised in the viewer's seemingly uncensored access to Kim's everyday "reality" (Schmitt, 2017: p. 122), which includes chopping wood, the consumption of basic meals cooked atop a simple furnace, and defecating outdoors in the snow. The film maintains "the look of a single-person-produced filmic autobiography" throughout, which for Gernalzick encompasses "purposely shaky hand-held camera images, fast pans, rough cuts [and] white noise on the soundtrack" (2006: p. 8), coupled with extreme close-ups of Kim's face. The use of these recognisable conventions signals the first-person mode of address, through which the viewer is invited to bear witness to the conditions of Kim's self-imposed exile. Aside from a cat, Kim is the singular focal subject of the film, leaving little doubt as to his status as the "target of empathy" (Schmitt, 2017: p. 121) and the embodied autobiographical 'I' (Lejeune, 1989) as author, narrator and subject of the filmic discourse. Kim's basic existence is asserted as autobiographical experience in a documentary style that conveys the implicit "generic agreements" (Lane, 2002: p. 23) of the autobiographical mode and its cognate claim to subjective truth, which consequently installs the viewer as an intimate and unobtrusive witness (see Laub, 1992).

⁴ Kim shared the prize with Andreas Dresen for *Stopped on Track* (2011).

Kim's stoic environment is an appropriate setting for "the cultivation of an autobiographical conscience", by which "one learns to be, and even strives for a sense of being, overseen" (Gilmore, 2001: p. 20). Following Foucault, Gilmore asserts that "autobiography can be viewed as a discipline, a self-study in surveillance" (p. 20), which for Kim entails a literal self-surveillance exercise enacted by turning the camera upon himself. As a filmmaker, Kim employs the creative medium with which he is most familiar to carry out his autobiographical act. From the isolation of his cabin, Kim's act of self-witnessing emerges piecemeal, primarily through "intense monologues [...] in front of the camera on a tripod" (Gernalzick, 2006: p. 8) in another recognisable convention of filmic autobiography. Kim's film conforms to the typically masculine autobiographical archetype, whereby the camera, and subsequent autofilmic testimony, is "the mirror in which the individual reflects his own image" (Gusdorf, 1980: p. 33). Kim asserts his self-reflexive agenda to the camera – and the viewer – to formally issue the autobiographical invitation: "By filming myself, I want to confess my life. Myself as a director and as a human being. I am making a film about me" (10:57-11:13). This statement of autobiographical intent, which Kim frames as confession, clearly sets out his narrative focus and designates the individualistic autobiographical paradigm and testimonial context in which the film operates.



Figure 1.1: *The subject Kim faces the second Kim in the 'interview'.*



Figure 1.2: *The second Kim faces the subject Kim in the 'interview'.*

The retrospective remit of autobiography coupled with the immediacy of the filmic form necessitates a narrative strategy that can reconcile the 'present' of the filmic discourse with the 'past' of the narrated experience. Schmitt argues "there is always a dilatory space between the event and the writing of the event", which "creates a fundamental discrepancy between the experiencing-I and the narrating-I" (2017: p. 141). For Schmitt, the two 'I's are in "constant interaction" within the autobiographical narrative, as the author must represent the particularities of experience as it happened along with the impact that experience had and the way the experience is remembered (2017: p. 141). Kim attempts to address this discrepancy in the film by staging a dialogic self-interrogation, instating a performative narrative strategy to convey the particularities of experience in tandem with its ongoing impact. In a mid-close shot, Kim is seated in his tent opposite the camera, positioned at a slight angle to it, and looking out of shot to the right (16:47) (see Figure 1.1). Then, from off screen, Kim's voice asks "you like living in a tent out in the country? Do you? Say it. Living in a cabin so cold you need a tent inside?" (16:47-17:00). The rough cut reveals the source of the voice as a second Kim, with the editing giving the impression that they are seated opposite one another in the tent through an eyeline match; the second Kim has his hair tied up, looking out of shot to the left (17:01) (see Figure 1.2). The second Kim addresses the subject Kim by his "proper name" (Lejeune, 1989: p. 20), one of Lejeune's requisite referential anchors in an autobiographical text, before levelling questions that provide the viewer with significant experiential and contextual details. Kim literally "calls himself as witness for himself" (Gusdorf, 1980: p. 29) within the film, in line with his individualistic and masculine construction of the autobiographical narrative. The stylised 'interaction' between the two Kims offers the narrating 'I's retrospective perspective on past experience, to articulate both the particularities, and the consequent impact of the events, in tandem, to effectively elide the narrative distance between the experiencing 'I' and the narrating 'I'. As the exchange concludes, Kim addresses the second Kim:

You, who questions me, you're Kim Ki-duk too. Not the Kim Ki-duk I am now. You're the natural Kim Ki-duk who's looking at my life. Thank you for your questions [...]. Thanks for the opportunity to talk. I really appreciate it.

(38:41-39:10)

Kim's expression of gratitude serves to confirm that both sides of the interview-style exchange belong to him, making clear that the testimonial narrative refers to him as the

real, individual autobiographical subject, Kim Ki-duk. In addition, a third Kim watches the exchange on a monitor (see Figure 1.3), which further indicates the interactive scene's construction, as the viewing Kim's position outside of the interaction on screen suggests his overall authorial control. The viewing Kim can be read as what Leah Anderst calls "the viewing 'I'" in her article "'I'VE SPENT A LOT OF TIME LOOKING at these images: The 'Viewing 'I' in Contemporary Autobiographical Documentary' (2013).⁵ For Anderst, the viewing 'I' "is a figure that stages or highlights the ambivalent movement, characteristic of many life narratives, between narrative coherence and the fragmentation of an autobiographical self" (Anderst, 2013, p. 223). Kim's inclusion of an embodied viewing 'I' draws attention to not only the 'constructedness' of the filmic discourse, but also the representation of the autobiographical 'I' within the narrative, as multiple iterations of the self across time throughout the testimonial project. Kim's fragmented representation of self/witness offers a paradoxically multiple *and* unilateral autobiographical narrative structure; he preserves the "dominant individualistic paradigm of male-authored autobiographical texts" (Benstock, 1988: pp. 7-8), and the self-made and self-reflexive construction of autofilmic testimony, whilst allowing for the necessary narrative convergence of the experiencing 'I', narrating 'I', and the viewing 'I'. This performative narrative strategy is a sophisticated assertion of the autobiographical 'I' as self-witness within the testimonial narrative, whereby Kim is able to provide the testimonial truth of experience alongside an evaluative exploration of the impact of experience, all from his own subjective perspective.

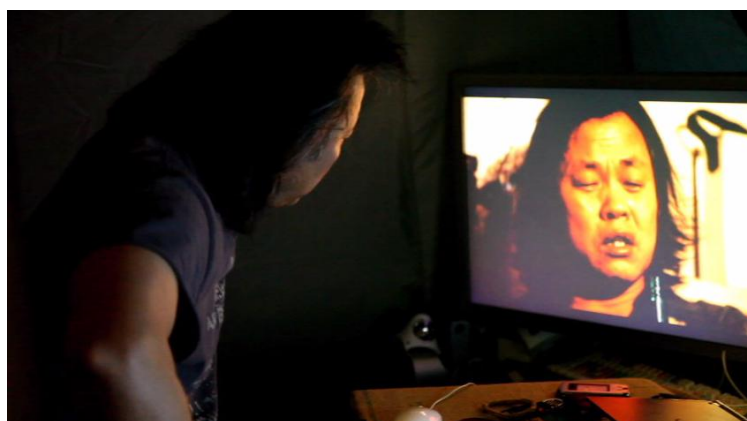


Figure 1.3: *The viewing Kim watches the subject Kim on a monitor.*

In addition to the performative construction of the autobiographical 'I' on screen, the interview construction also highlights the second Kim's function as a "coaxer/coercer" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 64) within the interaction, whose role is to prompt the subject

⁵ The article's title is presented here as it appears in the journal.

Kim's testimonial account. Following Plummer, Smith and Watson explain that in relation to autobiographical narratives, a coxer/coercer "is any person or institution or set of cultural imperatives that solicits or provokes people to tell their stories" (2010: p. 64), ranging from friends and relatives, to figures in more formal contexts like religious confession and legal testimony (2010: pp. 65-66). Kim's self-imposed solitude denies the inclusion of a material coxer within the autobiographical narrative, so he manifests one in the figure of himself, framing what is essentially his self-reflexive monologue as an 'interview' between the id and the ego (Freud, 1923/1961) in a performative, binary expression of conflicted selfhood. The second Kim asks:

What's been up with you since 2008? Is it because of that accident while shooting *Dream* in a jail? That actress in the hanging scene? You went off to another cell and cried right? It was an accident. Bet you got scared. You never saw that coming. Seeing her hanging there scared you to death. But you ran up the ladder and saved her! Then what's the problem? You think if you didn't act fast, you could have killed someone whilst making a movie? Scares you to death thinking about it. That's when you decided to quit making films? From that shock? Tell me you bastard!"

(18:43-19:46)

This performative narrative strategy brings the testimonial context into the filmic discourse, elaborating upon the events that led to Kim's exile to provide historical framing for the narrative and reduce the referential labour for the viewer. In the reverse shot, the subject Kim is close to tears, silently wiping his eyes and avoiding the eyeline of the second Kim, as yet unable to directly articulate self-witness (19:46). As the second Kim continues his questioning, the subject Kim glances toward the camera, acknowledging the viewer as the "unobtrusively present" witness (Laub, 1992: p. 71) (see Figure 1.4) (21:10). Though the interview construction between the two versions of the autobiographical subject draws attention to its artifice within the formal documentary context of the film, it invokes a distinctly documentary convention:

the talking head, and the interviewee's testimony are traditionally seen as being at documentary's cognitive heart, the powerhouse of claims to any 'reality effect' and very much concerned with conveying specific information and ideas.

(Cox, 2018: pp. 4-5)

The 'interview' functions at three different levels within the filmic discourse: to coax the autobiographical and testimonial narrative from the subject, as a vehicle for introducing the testimonial context delivered by the second Kim, and to simultaneously install and interrogate the 'reality effect' of a recognisably documentary convention.



Figure 1.4: *The subject Kim acknowledges the camera/viewer.*

In *Arirang*, Kim's self-witnessing testimony articulates the effects of the *Dream* incident on his career, whilst also revealing the ongoing impact of the traumatic event upon his psyche. The second Kim, in the role of the interviewer described above, states "I hate to see you like this [...]. You've been traumatised [...]. You're still in shock. Right?" (20:20-22:02). When Kim eventually responds to the second Kim's coaxing, he concedes:

There's nothing I can say. What would I say? That there was an accident during that film shoot. What meaning would that film have? And because of that trauma, I can look back on life, on how I've been making films. And think about what to do from now on.

(25:30-27:02)

Kim goes on to reveal that he still feels responsible for almost causing the actress to lose her life for his artistic vision; he blames himself for making unethical creative decisions and for always striving for "realistic details" (27:41) in his films. The revelation of trauma underscores the filmic narrative's self-witnessing function, which emphasises the ethical and empathic imperative of the testimonial witnessing structure. The subject Kim's initial silence under the second Kim's intense questioning is indicative of testimony's innate tension; for Gilmore, "the subject of trauma refers to both a subject struggling to make sense of an overwhelming experience in a particular context and the unspeakability of trauma itself" in terms of trauma's "resistance to representation" (p. 46).⁶ The struggle for

⁶ See also Caruth, 1995 and Felman and Laub, 1992.

Kim is determined by the need to process and articulate trauma, whilst unable to find an outlet, or witness, that will enable him to do so. The *Dream* incident is identified as the impetus for Kim's creative crisis and subsequent withdrawal from society; he states: "Making films was a happy job for me. But suddenly... It was like I got hit with a hammer then" (35:38) quantifying the impact of the experience in terms of a physical blow. The 'impact' of the traumatic incident on Kim leaves him unable to make films, which makes him 'unhappy', but his three-year abstinence from filmmaking perpetuates his unhappiness. In 'Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle' (1995), Laub refers to the testimony of a female Holocaust survivor who participated in his Fortunoff Video Archive interviews (p. 64); he describes the way the survivor experienced, and ultimately perpetuated, a sense of social detachment in the years afterwards. Her ongoing struggle with the desire to articulate experience, coupled with her inability to effectively relate to others, resulted in what Laub describes as the survivor's "self-inflicted emotional imprisonment" (p. 64). Though his original trauma is of a different order, Kim's struggle is similarly perpetuated and self-imposed, as his elective exile precludes the necessary testimonial process that could liberate him from his ongoing ordeal. Kim evaluates this existential stasis at a later point in the monologue: "whether I live pitifully in this shack, or make a big hit film and get so happy I can't sleep [...]. There's no big difference. We live by the law of inertia" (48:28-50). Kim fails to realise that the inertia he perceives is exacerbated by his withdrawal, and further determined by his lack of a creative and testimonial outlet.

Laub explains that testimony is a "process of exploration and reconciliation" (1995: p. 74) through which the subject is able to assimilate the 'world' before trauma with their circumstances in the present in order to liberate themselves from the perpetual struggle (Laub, 1995: p. 70). In a meandering response to his shadow – another performative incarnation of selfhood – Kim identifies the "need for time to get over the pain", to "hate then forgive" (1:01:58), which speaks to the necessary processing and reconciliation of traumatic experience. For Kim, emancipating himself from the film industry was a failed attempt to "work through" (LaCapra, 2014: p. 47) trauma, which he eventually achieves in the production of his autofilmic testimony, as an artistic outlet for self-witnessing. In line with Laub's notion of reconciliation, Gilmore asserts that "trauma [...] always exists within complicated histories", which means that self-witnessing "entails contextualizing [trauma] within history" (2001: p. 31). Accordingly, the self-witnessing narrative that emerges in *Arirang* depicts Kim conducting a retrospective and autobiographical evaluation of his life prior to the *Dream* incident, focusing primarily on his work and relationships, which he considers inextricably linked. In an introspective monologue, the subject Kim muses:

Basically, if I sum up my life in a word, I think it's loneliness up to this point. I didn't have any friends in school. My only friend was a mixed kid people despised [...]. Whether there were people around me, I was basically a lonely person.

(45:42-46:29)

This observation echoes the sentiment of an earlier reflective moment, in which Kim recalls his life before filmmaking, when he “always felt lonely and sorry for [himself]” (34:27). Kim’s self-exploration reveals that he has always had difficulties forging relationships and relating to others, but that through film he found “a way of communication” (52:08), and built relationships with co-workers that felt “like family” (23:51) for him. The loss of those relationships, and the concurrent exclusion of his chosen creative and communicative outlet, are two important factors in Kim’s inability to liberate himself from trauma. Furthermore, Kim’s filmmaking career is central to his sense of self; his frustration at his self-imposed loss of agency and identity manifest in the statement “I want to film to show that I am still a director” (57:06). Kim elaborates on his earlier statement of autobiographical intent, cited above, in a series of conflicting claims:

I can't make a film so I'm filming myself. My life right now is a documentary and a drama. I'm the actor now. That's what I think films are. A truth. [...] I'm filming myself into a drama right now. People may call this a documentary, but I think it is a drama.

(55:24-56:15)

Kim specifically addresses the tension underlying the process of making *Arirang*, between the subjective truth of self-witness and the expression of traumatic experience, acknowledging the critical tendency to classify film as diametrically documentary or drama, non-fiction or fiction. However, Kim’s evaluation is particularly telling, as it is also revealing of his traumatised reluctance for realism, which underwrites the narrative complexity of the film. For Kim, filmmaking is an important aspect of his identity, which he seeks to reassert through his autofilmic testimony. However, he remains aware of the industry critique his film will inevitably attract, and this anxiety underpins his desire – and reluctance – to return to filmmaking. Sociologist, Erving Goffman describes the existential tension underlying attempts to convey selfhood to others:

the individual may attempt to induce the audience to judge him [...] in a particular way, and he may seek this judgement as an ultimate end in itself, and yet he may not completely believe that he deserves the

valuation of self which he asks for or that the impression of reality which he fosters is valid.

(1990: p. 32)

Whilst refusing to designate the film a documentary, Kim readily deploys recognisably documentary conventions to underpin the testimonial claim to subjective truth inherent in the process of self-witnessing. At the same time, Kim attempts to reassert the lost artistic authority that defines his professional identity as a filmmaker through *Arirang*.

Consequently, and in spite of all narrative and contextual indications to the contrary, Kim attempts to moderate his autobiographical invitation – whilst paradoxically invoking the testimonial tenor of documentary – in his attempt to subtend generic distinctions and reassert his creative agency as intrinsic to his liberation through the self-witnessing process.

In working through his traumatic experience towards a return to filmmaking, Kim reconciles his past with his present by engaging with his own films, watching them on his laptop inside his tent. Kim is overcome with emotion as he watches yet another version of himself onscreen, this time as the male protagonist, a monk, in his own feature *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring* (2003). The monk undertakes an arduous pilgrimage to the top of a mountain, climbing through snowy woodland whilst carrying a heavy effigy, dragging a circular stone that is tied to his waist behind him. The scene is intercut with closely-framed shots of Kim watching intently, wrapped protectively in a blanket; as the monk struggles on screen, Kim begins to weep, progressing to convulsive sobs and high-pitched wails of despair. This complex “scene of empathy” (Plantinga, 1999) illustrates the numerous ways in which autofilmic testimony can prompt and sustain the phenomenological invitation to ‘feel with’ the autobiographical subject in the act of testimonial witnessing. Plantinga explains that “facial expressions in film not only communicate emotion, but also elicit, clarify and strengthen affective response – especially empathetic response” (1999: p. 240). He further argues that these responses are mobilised “through the processes of affective mimicry, facial feedback, and emotional contagion” (Plantinga, 1999: p. 240) as related to our human ability to read and communicate with other people. Plantinga draws on theoretical approaches from the behavioural sciences to describe the “core of pancultural similarities for the expression and recognition of basic emotions” (p. 242) on the human face, which allow and encourage empathic engagement as part of the communicative process. He further references the work of film scholars Noël Carroll and Ed Branigan to explain the way that film narratives capitalise on viewers’ ability to ‘read’ faces, and encourage us to reconcile

filmic editing techniques that imply proximity to determine the cause and effect of the emotional states of the characters represented on screen (p. 241). For Plantinga, the scene of empathy comprises “extended closeups of emoting faces” (p. 244), either in isolation or within a point-of-view structure, which, together with “narrative context” (p. 251) prompt viewers to respond empathically. This empathy, Plantinga explains, entails responding “congruently” (p. 245) as opposed to sharing the same emotions as the film character, characterised by a shared “orientation” (p. 245) – or feeling with. Plantinga’s understanding of empathy accords with Schmitt’s, who explains that acceptance of the autobiographical invitation entails “*empathic relation*”, which involves “acknowledging [the subject’s] horrifying reality” and “*believing him*” (original italics, Schmitt, 2017: p. 110). Accordingly, the scene of empathy in *Arirang*, described above, invites empathic engagement in a number of ways. Initially, the viewer shares in Kim’s viewing experience, by watching him watching the monk suffering through his pilgrimage. Kim’s emotional response to the film can be read as his own empathic engagement with the film character, the monk, for whom Kim experiences congruent emotions that relate to his perception of the character’s hardship within the fictional narrative. However, the narrative context, as determined by *Arirang*’s self-witnessing agenda, invites the viewer to feel with the autobiographical subject Kim, for whom the film he is watching represents his former happiness as a filmmaker, which he wishes to regain. There are a number of subtextual cues in the first half of *Arirang* that prompt the viewer to reconcile the monk’s solipsistic journey with Kim’s isolated self-witnessing project, namely the close shots of Kim’s cracked heels and the snow-covered hillsides in the establishing shots, which are mirrored in the scenes he watches from *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring*. Nevertheless, whether Kim’s tears belong to his own sorrow, or to his empathic response to the film character, or to the perceived similitude between the monk’s plight and his own, Kim’s demonstrative desolation on screen is undeniably affecting; the close shots of Kim’s face and his seemingly credible outpouring of emotion convey recognisable sadness, which prompts congruent emotions in the viewer through affect contagion and facial mimicry. But, most significantly, the scene of empathy extends Kim’s phenomenological, autobiographical invitation to ‘feel with’ him to the viewer in their role as willing, ethical and empathic witness, as he shares the reality of his testimonial process.

The film’s final scenes take the testimonial narrative to a creative and metaphorical extreme, in which Kim achieves reconciliation and liberation by exercising his artistic agency. The extended scene of empathy represents a turning point for Kim within the film, after which he emerges from the struggle of his self-imposed exile to ‘execute’ three unseen figures in the city. The documentary aesthetic is retained throughout, as close,

subjective shots show Kim crafting a pistol; however, the truth-telling program of the film is progressively subverted, as Kim drives through the night to shoot three unseen targets. At the sites of the first two shootings, the viewer is denied the proximity heretofore afforded throughout the film, as Kim exits the car at each location, leaving the camera – and the viewer – in the vehicle’s passenger seat. At each location, the viewer sees an unsteady, hand-held shot of the exterior of a building, before a single gunshot is heard and Kim returns to the car. At the third location, the subjective perspective is reinstated, and the viewer accompanies Kim into a building, hearing his footsteps as he descends the stairs (1:25:46). The gun comes into shot from the right of the frame, and the trigger is pulled, but once again, neither Kim nor the target are visible (1:25:53). On returning to his vehicle, Kim exhales heavily, with the same relief he displayed after watching *Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring* (1:19:20), which likens his unseen actions with his earlier emotional release, framing both encounters as equally cathartic. Kim then disarms the pistol and places it in the centre console before driving away (1:26:08). When he returns to the cabin, Kim positions himself once more in front of the mounted camera, breathing heavily with wet hair, staring directly into the lens. The reverse shot is from Kim’s subjective perspective, and the blurred image comes into focus to reveal that the gun is mounted in place of the camera (1:26:52). This subjective reverse-shot construction is repeated, before Kim gives the directorial instruction “Ready! Action!” (1:27:15), his last words on screen echoing his first. After the cut, the close-up shows Kim’s hand pulling on a taught wire, which, as the following shot discloses, controls the gun’s firing mechanism (1:27:19); the close framing of the weapon mirrors the earlier scene in which Kim pulled the trigger on the unseen target (1:25:53). The gun shot accompanies a jump-cut to an image of a wooden crate, painted with a figure riding a ‘haetae’ (1:27:21).⁷ The haetae is a mythical creature that symbolises law and justice in Korean mythology (Choi, 2005); however, Chongko Choi points out that in contemporary cultural understanding, the haetae is an emblem of protection, as “a good animal that prevents disasters” (2005: p. 38). In ‘Narrating Pain: The Power of Catharsis’ (2007), Richard Kearney explores the use of myths and “the cathartic function of fictional narratives” (2007: p. 57), drawing on the work of Aristotle, Claude Levi-Strauss and Lisa Schnell to describe the “purgative release” (2007: p. 59) from trauma that fictional narratives can offer. For Kearney, “what cannot be solved historically [...] can be resolved fictionally” (p. 54) through the cathartic and “equilibrating function” (p. 54) of narrative. In *Arirang*, the executions Kim carries out offer catharsis through fictional, narrative restitution, whereby he is able to exorcise those he

⁷ The haetae is also found in Chinese folklore, spelled xiezhi, and is similarly associated with notions of justice.

feels have come between him and his liberation from traumatised inertia, including himself. Kim invokes both the image and the myth of the haetae, to underscore the sense of 'justice' his fictional actions afford. The final 'shot', which plays on the synonymy of the verb's use in videography and the firing of weapons, signifies resolution, as the elimination of the traumatised self, and the ultimate reassertion of agency through filmmaking.

The coda to the autofilmic testimony confirms Kim's liberation and reconciliation, concluding the film with a final assertion of creative and narrative authority. The viewer shares Kim's subjective viewpoint as he drives away from his isolation, followed by an unsteady pan of his paintings, with an intertitle that reads: "Paintings drawn in 1990, in Cap d'Agde, France" (1:28:01). The photographic montage that follows shows Kim in various candid poses, at press conferences, on film sets, and winning awards; these shots are complemented by stills from some of his films (1:29:10-1:30:13). The raw audio that accompanies these final scenes is Kim's titular refrain: the folksong 'Arirang'. These final scenes echo a reflective episode in the middle of the film (40:40-41:47), where Kim drunkenly sings Arirang in front of the camera, intercut with shaky panning shots of his paintings, film posters and scripts hanging in a sparse basement. Kim explains the song's meaning: "when I sing this song, I can understand it all [...]. It means self-realisation" (41:48-42:16), claiming that for him, the song's lyrics represent the inevitable ups and downs of life. Within the film's testimonial context, the song comes to signify the process of self-witness, through which Kim explores, reflects upon, and reconciles his traumatically inflected autobiographical experience. The final sequence of images coupled with Kim's singing draws together the 'before', 'during' and 'after' of Kim's narrative of witness, to underline the testimonial function of the film and emphasise the reconciliation of the fragmented autobiographical subject. The ultimate inscription of narrative authority and autobiographical subjectivity is contained within the singular, hand-painted title-card that bears only Kim's name (1:30:14), closing the autofilmic testimony with a paratextual reference to real, liberated Kim Ki-duk who continues to exist beyond the filmic frame.

In *Arirang*, Kim uses the recognisable subjective conventions of filmic autobiography and documentary to install the intimacy of his autobiographical invitation, whilst refusing generic distinction in the testimonial narrative. Instead, Kim chooses to articulate self-witnessing through individualistic, creative and performative narrative strategies that enable him to explore and evaluate his experience in a typically masculine autobiographical project. The multiple iterations of the subject on screen convey the fragmented psyche of a traumatised subject, whilst simultaneously converging the

autobiographical 'I' to convey a unified, introspective and retrospective account of his career and relationships. Kim's testimonial truth emerges through stylised coaxing, to contextualise his solipsistic withdrawal from filmmaking as the self-imposed perpetuation of traumatised inertia. With the viewer as his requisite unobtrusive and willing witness, Kim articulates the reconciliatory process of self-realisation, inviting empathic engagement through unguarded, emotional episodes that are intensified by the filmic narrative mode. For Kim, the production of his autofilmic testimony is a necessarily creative and cathartic expression of self-witnessing, through which he is able to work through traumatic experience to reassert his lost creative agency. Kim's return to filmmaking in the years since *Arirang*'s release attests to his definitive liberation from the artistic and existential struggle he overcomes in his autofilmic testimony.

Testimonial Textures in *Tarnation*

Aspiring actor and filmmaker Jonathan Caouette's first film, *Tarnation* premiered at MIX NYC in 2003 before an edited version was screened at the Sundance Film Festival in 2004. The latter version of Caouette's "weirdly beautiful, cubist act of self-exploration" (Foundas, 2004) was invited to Cannes, where it received two nominations in the Golden Camera and C.I.C.A.E. Award categories. The film went on to win numerous awards on the festival circuit, including the British Film Institute's Sutherland Trophy (2004) and the National Society of Film Critics award for Best Non-Fiction Film (2005). Caouette's autofilmic testimony primarily focuses upon his relationship with his mother, whilst exploring childhood trauma and mental illness with reference to his own family history. According to Anna Poletti, Jonathan Caouette "expands upon and continues the tradition of personal documentary filmmaking" (2012: p. 160) to effectively convey autobiographical experience within a relationally constructed and contextually discursive narrative continuum. In addition to subjective and reflexive documentary practices, Caouette incorporates an amalgamation of found footage taken from home videos, family photographs and answering machine messages to construct a multimedial, first-person perspective with an evidentiary aspect. *Tarnation* provides an overview of Caouette's childhood with reference to the instability caused by his mother's mental health issues, to evaluate the ongoing impact of his mother's condition on his life and self-formation. As autofilmic testimony, *Tarnation* illustrates the ways in which self-witnessing in film can convey the relational and familial context of autobiographical experience. Furthermore, Caouette's use of multimedial and intertextual citations evince the memory work of testimonial telling, to assist with the viewer's referential reconciliation of the autobiographical 'I' within and through the text.

Where Arirang advances a solipsistic model of self-witnessing, Caouette's *Tarnation* elucidates self-witness within a relational and familial model, where the context of his "social frame" (Schmitt, 2017: p. 11) is intrinsic to his testimonial account. In his book *The Autobiographical Documentary in America*, Jim Lane claims "The story of the filmmaker's life, who that filmmaker is, emerges in relation to the mosaic of the family as autobiography encompasses the biography of the family" (2002, p. 95-6), whilst Judith Butler asserts that "the 'I' has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation – or set of relations – to a set of norms" (2005: p. 8). For Caouette, the filmic articulation of the testimonial I/eye entails an autobiographical narrative that emerges within his family dynamic, which, as the film reveals, is largely at odds with the traditional, hegemonic standard. The scenes that introduce the familial context of his autobiographical act show chronologically sequential photographs of Caouette's grandparents, Rosemary and Adolph Davis, as well as their daughter, Renee, as a child, whilst the intertitles narrate a traditional family history:

Once upon a time in a small Texas town in the early 1950s, a very good man met a very good woman... The man, Adolph and the woman, Rosemary... fell in love and got married. They had a beautiful daughter, Renee. Everything in their lives was bright, happy and promising.

(08:11-08:49)

Caouette invokes the fairy-tale introduction to imply the normative and optimistic familial standard that his testimonial account eventually subverts, but which also provides familial and contextual background information for the viewer within the filmic discourse. This narrative strategy establishes both the "positionality" and "relationality" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 215) of Caouette's autobiographical narrative, which determine his autobiographical "subject position" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 215). Smith and Watson explain that positionality "designates how speaking subjects take up, inhabit, and speak through" particular cultural and historical "discourses of identity" (2010: p. 215), whilst relationality refers to the way that autobiographical narratives interact and intersect with the biographies of relational others (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 216).⁸ In the sequence quoted above, Caouette offers contextual framing for his self-reflexive project, to convey the historical and geographical details of narrative positionality, whilst asserting the relational structure of his autobiographical act of self-witnessing.

⁸ See also Eakin (2008 and 1999) and Miller (2007). I examine relationality more closely in Chapter Four in the discussion of auto/biographical narratives.

The testimonial agenda of Caouette's film is revealed through the autobiographical narrative's relational dynamic, which focusses primarily on his relationship with his mother, Renee Le Blanc. Renee is the first person to be revealed on screen, and her name is listed first in the film's opening credits, which makes her central role clear from the outset and designates her a "significant other" within Caouette's autobiographical narrative. For Smith and Watson, significant others are those "through whom the narrator understands her or his own self-formation" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 86), as key figures within the subject's autobiographical experience. After establishing the familial context in the sequence described earlier, Renee's past dominates the narrative, as Caouette goes on to disclose the circumstances that caused the idyllic family structure to break down. Caouette reveals that his mother fell from the roof of her house as a child, resulting in a period of paralysis that ultimately led to a course of electroshock therapy (10:02); this incident is foregrounded as the catalyst for Renee's lifelong struggle with mental illness, which underpins the film's relational testimonial narrative. Caouette uses intertitles to explain that in the years after the fall, Renee was frequently hospitalised for psychiatric treatment (11:27), further stating that her psychosis made her both erratic and vulnerable, with traumatic consequences for them both:

In the winter of 1977 [...] Renee, in a psychotic state, took Jonathan to Chicago with no money and no place to stay. They immediately encountered trouble. Renee was raped in front of Jonathan by a man who picked them up off the street.

(12:00-12:40)

Renee's rape and her subsequent psychological deterioration led to her further institutionalisation, which meant Caouette was taken into foster care (13:09). But, whilst Caouette's grandparents fought for custody of him, he suffered "extreme emotional and physical abuse" (13:57) at the hands of his foster parents, which went on for two years. In that time, Renee was subjected to more electro-shock therapy, which permanently altered her "personality" and "state of mind" (14:26-14:46). Caouette reports these related events in tandem to emphasise the connection between his mother's traumatic experience and his own, which makes her testimonial narrative intrinsic to his act of self-witnessing.

Autobiographical and testimonial accounts that include intimate biographical details require a sensitive and ethical approach, particularly in cases that reference the lives of "vulnerable subjects" (Couser, 2004). G. Thomas Couser defines vulnerable subjects as those who may be unable to vouch for themselves, including minors, and those with significant impairments or disabilities, stating their inability "to offer meaningful consent" as

a particularly ethical concern (2004: p. xii). He further emphasises the “urgent need for ethical scrutiny” in “intimate life writing”, which involves the representation of family members or romantic partners (2004: p. xii), asking “what are the author’s responsibilities to those whose lives are used as ‘material’?” (2004: p. 34).⁹ This question is especially complex in *Tarnation*, as the inclusion of his close family – especially his mother – is fundamental to Caouette’s self-witnessing project. Renee’s inclusion within the film’s testimonial narrative is fundamentally problematic due to her history of trauma and mental illness, which make her particularly vulnerable. Caouette incorporates Renee’s personal testimony in a relational and dialogic structure by staging interviews, which, as explained in my analysis of *Arirang*, are a documentary convention with connotations of reality and truth. Renee is depicted as both a reluctant and unreliable self-witness, as her verbal accounts waiver between seemingly lucid candour and outright denial. When Caouette questions Renee about the fall, she becomes frustrated and walks out of the closely framed shot (1:04:18-1:04:24). After the cut, Renee refuses another of Caouette’s interview questions, when he asks about her memories of the time she spent in psychiatric facilities (1:04:24-1:04:36). Caouette can be heard from behind the camera encouraging Renee’s co-operation, whilst he quickly turns the camera to follow her through the apartment, asking: “will you please just help me with my stupid film?” (1:04:45). These scenes posit Caouette as a “coaxer/coercer” (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 64) (as explained with reference to *Arirang*, above), as he tries to encourage Renee’s personal account. But, Caouette’s self-witnessing agenda dominates the filmic discourse, as from Renee’s former position in front of the camera, he levels “You know, I’d like to find out a few things about myself too” (1:05:43). This exchange exemplifies the tension implicit in what Couser calls “collaborative autobiography”, which he deems “oxymoronic” (2004: p. 35). Couser explains: “although the process by which the text is produced is dialogic, the product is monological” because “[t]he dialogue is managed and presented by one party, the nominal author” (2004: p. 35). This tension is further evinced when Renee takes control of the camera to film Caouette; Caouette literally exerts his narrative authority by remonstrating with Renee over her handling of his camera, before physically reclaiming the equipment and his narrative authority (1:12:00-05). In *Tarnation*, Renee’s elocutions are both prompted and deliberately positioned within the film’s narrative to support and sustain Caouette’s own self-reflexive and testimonial point-of-view. Consequently, Caouette’s attempt to present his mother’s testimony in tandem with his

⁹ I focus on the issues pertaining to the representation of vulnerable subjects in Chapter Three, with reference to adaptation and *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (Bauby, 1997 and Schnabel, 2007).

own is overshadowed by the self-witnessing agenda of his autofilmic testimony, which, though relationally constructed, is ultimately and necessarily self-interested.

The most obvious assertion of Caouette's self-reflexive and autobiographical focus is the prevalence of his own image within the filmic discourse. Amongst a plethora of often fleeting intertextual images, the most pervasive are those that depict Caouette himself, as a visual inscription of embodied autobiographical subjectivity. The profusion of photographic and videographic images of Caouette are indicative of his narrative sovereignty, serving as a constant reminder for the viewer of his status as the autobiographical subject and empathic target of the autofilmic testimony. Much like Kim in *Arirang*, Caouette capitalises on the affective and empathic potential of closely framed shots of his face, in a recurrent autofilmic posture that sees the subject returning the viewer's gaze, to which I will return. As Anna Poletti and others have observed, Caouette "expands upon and continues the tradition of personal documentary filmmaking" (2012: p. 160),¹⁰ by reappropriating images of himself from "inherently intimate" (2012: p. 164) home videos. The intimacy suggested by Caouette's use of "archival documents" (Poletti, 2012: p. 160) is predicated on the "connotative relationship to the private sphere as a site of production and viewing" that home videos imply (p. 163), which refers to the fact that they are often made and consumed in familial settings as "home truths" (p. 164). By allowing the viewer access to such personal footage in the film, Caouette provides multiple images of himself as the embodied subject, whilst simultaneously establishing the required intimacy for empathic engagement. His intertextual narrative strategy invites the ethical and empathic mode of viewership that equates to testimonial witnessing, with an offer of verification and authenticity inscribed by the personal and archival qualities of the "cited" (Poletti, 2012: p. 167) footage.

The use of multimedial artefacts in *Tarnation* is a characteristically autobiographical and documentary practice, which speaks to the truthful and "veridical" (Plantinga, 2010: p. xiv) offer of showing and telling that autofilmic testimony issues. But, Caouette's intertextual narrative approach also communicates the way in which he reconciles the narrated 'I' of the testimonial narrative (product) with the narrating 'I' of the documentary endeavour (process). In Caouette's case, the narrating 'I' is emphatically asserted as the viewing 'I', which Anderst describes as "a self born from the autobiographer's encounter with images, a self that thinks through and analyzes the very processes of life narrative by pausing over images" (Anderst, 2013: p. 215). Caouette's identity as both a filmmaker and an autobiographical subject emerges through his relationship with the camera, and through

¹⁰ See also Anderst, 2013; Orgeron and Orgeron, 2007, Renov, 2008, and Scott, 2004.

the videos and photographs he has taken, viewed, and reinserted into the testimonial narrative. Where Kim inhabits multiple roles within his autofilmic testimony, using fragmented, performative iterations of the self to construct a coherent, dialogic narrative, Caouette both cites images of the “‘real’ or historical ‘I’” (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 72) and situates his narrating ‘I’ within the filmic discourse at the same time. In other words, the various archival and documentary images of Caouette represent subjectivity at different times within the narrated autobiographical experience, to show how he engages with his past in the process of constructing his testimony. For Anderst, the videos and photographs Caouette uses “function as technologies of memory” (2013: p. 225), which are both reviewed and inserted into the film as ‘real’ records of self and experience. In Anderst’s discussion of *Tarnation*, she draws on Patricia Hampl’s work on autobiographical filmmaking, which describes the genre as “preoccupied not with telling a life story but with conveying perception itself, with searching for the peculiar character of the perceiving consciousness” (1996: p. 56), which accords with Schmitt’s assertion that “since autobiography stems from experience, [the autobiographer’s] very peculiar experiential nature matters” (2017: p. 128). The way Caouette assembles the home-video footage and photographs, along with audio recordings, clips from television and film, and popular songs, reflects the dissociative condition he defines in the film. The frenetic, collage effect of seemingly disparate images and audio conveys the ‘perceiving consciousness’ of his viewing ‘I’ through the spectrum of Caouette’s “depersonalization disorder” (22:26), which is described onscreen as “persistent or recurrent episodes of feeling detached from, and as if one is an outside observer of, one’s mental processes or body (feeling like one is in a dream)” (22:27). Speaking of the section of film accompanied by his audio diary from autumn 1986, the time he was hospitalised after accidentally ingesting PCP, Caouette reflects in the director’s commentary that he “let the sound sort of choose where the photographs and footage would go” (26:45). The images displayed depict Caouette confronting the camera’s gaze, whilst physically battling a manic, emotional episode, pulling at his face and hair, intercut with a poised, pre-teen Jonathan who is smoking a cigarette in an oversized blazer (25:35). The photomontage is foregrounded against images of severed, bloody limbs representative of the underlying detachment Caouette articulates in his audio diary, which connects the otherwise incongruent layers of imagery. Antony Rowland argues:

Testimony can only be performed through form and genre, and poetic forms are adept – particularly in the lyric – at conveying the epiphanic moment, truncated traumatic recollections, silences beyond the black print,

and the emotive space that need not be repressed behind the supposed objectivity of testimonial facts.

(2014: pp. 4-5)

Caouette's "lyrical use of editing" (Anderst, 2013: p. 235), in the above examples and throughout *Tarnation*, allows him to convey the "epiphanic moment[s] of witnessing" (Rowland, 2014: p. 5) inherent in testimonial narratives. *Tarnation*'s multimedial, audio-visual mosaic construction is indicative of Caouette's perception of autobiographical experience, how it is re-viewed, reviewed and reassembled in the film, and consequently shared with the viewer as personal, if not necessarily coherent, subjective truth.

Scott McCloud's model from *Understanding Comics* (1993) offers another useful approach to 'reading' *Tarnation* as autofilmic testimony, providing practical means for the interpretation of Caouette's multimodal imagery and often frenetic narrative structure as a kinetic form of "sequential art" (Eisner in McCloud, 1993: p. 5). Although *Tarnation* is a motion picture, it is chockfull of photomontages, panels of images, and short video clips, which can be read as referential "concepts" and representative "icons" (McCloud, 1993), all of which are spliced together by sequential edits and anchored by intertitles in a progressive visual story. These edits can be perceived as "gutters" (McCloud, 1993: p. 66), that invite the viewer to reconcile – or 'close' – the gaps in the narrative. For example, Caouette has no footage of his time in foster care, yet it is important for him to present a visual to accompany the narrative intertitles that necessarily describe this significant and traumatic period of his life. To address this, Caouette presents footage of his own young son, Joshua, as a toddler sandwiched between photographs of himself at a similar age (13:40-14:08); the edits encourage "closure" (McCloud, 1993: p. 63) that makes the series of images appear to be representative of Caouette in his infancy. The viewer is able to reconcile this image as Caouette due to his editing – which acts as a gutter – where "human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea" (McCloud, 1993: p. 66). Similarly, Caouette posits footage of a woman having a bite-plate placed into her mouth intercut with multiple snapshots of his mother, flickering between images of Renee and the anonymous woman with electrical visual and audio effects as an ancillary for Renee's shock treatment (15:34-15:56). By supplementing representative imagery in place of authentic, autobiographical artefacts within the collage construction of his autofilmic testimony, Caouette is able to address the inarticulability of traumatic experience, and "its resistance to representation" (Gilmore, 2001: p. 45). The testimonial context and the ethical and empathic parameters of the testimonial witnessing structure encourage the viewer to either overlook, or 'close' these referential inconsistencies as a

condition of bearing witness. By inviting the viewer to engage with the aspects of his testimonial truth that are most resistant to narrative representation, Caouette remains true to the agenda of self-witnessing in spite of his creative management of visual materials.



Figure 1.5: *Caouette performing 'Hilary' in a home-video.*

In addition to the explicitly constructed sequences in *Tarnation*, Caouette conveys the testimonial truth of traumatic experience in a number of performative and intertextual ways that rely upon the viewer's referential and reconciliatory effort. One scene in particular has received significant critical and academic attention, namely the home-video footage of Caouette's characterisation of "Hilary Chapman Laura-Lou Garia" (15:59) at the age of eleven (Anderst, 2013; Poletti, 2012; Chapman, 2009; et al.). The character Caouette plays is presented as a young mother and domestic abuse victim, seemingly testifying to having shot her husband 'Jimmy' after enduring years of abuse. The scene involves a costumed Caouette in a direct address to camera; 'her' body language is submissive and anxious, and her speech stuttered throughout the testimonial account (see figure 5).

Academic approaches to the scene focus primarily on the way the performance conveys Caouette's childhood experience with abuse and domestic violence, as Chapman contends: "The effect of this scene is a complex one as it becomes only too clear to the viewer that the boy has knowledge of domestic violence, victim psychology and court procedures" (2009, p. 61). Chapman also claims that the 'character' Caouette inhabits challenges "the subjective nature of the scene" by the very nature of its performativity, given the way "it is acted out as representing a made-up world" (p. 61). But, for Chapman, the performance betrays experience, which accords with Caouette's self-witnessing agenda. However, Poletti goes on to explain that Caouette's performance, and the intertextual cues that emerge in the Hilary scene, reveal that there is more to this scene than a performative testimony of personal experience. Though Poletti does not contest the

“truth-telling power” (p. 168) of Caouette’s performative footage, she argues that this scene, when considered within the intertextual “collage” construction of the film (p. 167), represents Caouette’s “deliberate attempt to dissolve the boundaries between the documents of popular culture and the moving images of the family archive” (pp. 167-8). For Poletti:

The use of popular culture and the camera as technology of self are central to the autobiographical project of *Tarnation*, where ‘evidence’ of experience and affective intensities are drawn from sources far beyond the domestic and the personal.

(p. 168)

As a result, the Hilary vignette is both unsettling and engaging as an authentic insight into Caouette’s traumatic childhood, but also revealing of his performative experiments with the ‘cultural scripts’ of television and film. Anderst’s conception of Caouette’s viewing ‘I’ supports Poletti’s reading of this scene, as Anderst claims “Caouette links his autobiographical self, his self as a filmmaker and a creator, with his history as a viewer of many different kinds of visual media” including “television, feature films, movie musicals, and underground films” (2013: p. 215). Consequently, the Hilary testimony functions as a complex “scene of empathy” (Plantinga, 1999) within the testimonial context of the film. The direct and affective engagement of the viewer is invited by Caouette’s indirect expression of an experiential truth claim, whilst the testimonial scene simultaneously “[models] all the genre traits of melodrama which communicate a ‘true story’ of victimisation” (Poletti, 2012: p. 166). The viewer engages with Caouette’s performed testimony and the subjective truth it seeks to convey, whilst the scene’s empathic potential is drawn from its dual status as authentic archival footage of the real subject and the affective capacity of its reinscription of cultural testimonial contexts.



Figure 1.6: *Caouette delivers his final confessional address to camera.*

By contrast, the most direct testimonial address Caouette makes in *Tarnation* complicates empathic engagement, as a consequence of its performative emotional display. Caouette attempts an evaluative piece-to-camera in the bathroom of his New York apartment at the end of the film, this time without the smokescreen of performed character. In the commentary, Caouette claims that he originally conceived of the film's ending as a fictional episode in which his grandfather would shoot him, similar to the restitution scene in *Arirang*, but he concluded that "The ending needed to be the god-damned truth" (1:20:00). However, the confessional address appears staged, as Caouette constructs a scene intended to summarise and underscore the self-witnessing agenda of the film in what he calls (in the director's commentary) his attempt to "cap the ending with a testimony" (1:21:03). Caouette self-consciously prepares for his delivery, seated on the toilet in front of the mounted camera. He smokes a cigarette and adjusts the framing, before finally beginning to speak: "It's like five in the morning and I wanted this to kind of be in the dark like it was when I was younger" (1:21:28). Here, Caouette admits that the staging of the scene is a deliberate attempt to create narrative continuity, referencing the numerous home-videos that punctuate the film in which he is alone in the bathroom with just his camera for company. Caouette mentions the proximity of his mother, which he feels threatens the integrity of expression: "My mother is downstairs right now [...] so I'm really, I'm really scared of letting myself go to, um, talk about anything right now" (1:22:00). In the ensuing monologue, Caouette struggles to articulate the emotional impact of coping with his mother's psychological problems, before admitting "I don't ever want to turn out like my mother, and I'm scared because, um, when I was little and she was my age, the age I am now, which is 31, um, she seemed a lot better than she does

now" (1:22:50-1:23:18). At this point it becomes clear that Caouette's relationship with his mother contributes to his fear of experiencing the same psychological deterioration she has suffered, and that her proximity exacerbates this underlying anxiety. The scenes preceding the address show that Caouette has become Renee's primary caretaker, as she now lives with him and his boyfriend, David Sanin Paz, in New York. Caouette confronts and articulates the realisation that his mother's problems will always be his problems by proxy, before acknowledging the subjective truth that permeates the relational structure of his autofilmic testimony: "I love my mother so much, as fucked up as it is. I can't escape her" (1:23:21-33). Caouette's confessional again highlights the relationality of their ongoing shared experience, bringing into relief the "auto/biographical demand" (Gilmore, 2001: p. 72) of testimony. But, in the DVD commentary that accompanies this scene, Caouette admits that he is "not a fan of any of this [footage]" (1:21:21), adding that the scene was intended to convey the emotions he felt upon becoming his mother's caretaker. In the commentary, Caouette explains that he wanted to cry, to "half act and half be real" (1:21:38), but that he "couldn't conjure up any tears" (1:21:41) (see Figure 1.6). The 'truth' of what Caouette is saying is not diminished by his lack of emotion on screen, but his inability to cry precludes the kind of affect contagion prompted by emotional scenes of empathy, as seen in *Arirang*. Caouette's admission of dissatisfaction with his own monologue for lacking in genuine sentiment implies that he considers the authentic narrative construction of testimony and the relative affective intensity of autofilmic self-witnessing as inextricably linked. But, the testimonial witnessing structure is not dependent upon such strategies to ensure willing empathic engagement, as the autobiographical invitation of the first-person address, and the testimonial context of the film both encourage and sustain the viewer's empathic engagement in their role as a willing witness.

Caouette's autofilmic testimony pushes the boundaries of the documentary form in an intertextual and relational construction of self-witnessing. The 'offer of seeing' the film makes illustrates autobiographical experience through the use of multimedial artefacts of memory and creative and lyrical narrative strategies; these afford the viewer an insight into the historical and testimonial context of self-formation, whilst demonstrating Caouette's unique subjective perspective as influenced by his engagement with visual culture. Caouette's understanding of his traumatic past is conveyed in a relational narrative structure that recognises his mother's significant role in both his autobiographical experience and his testimonial narrative, which underscores the inevitably social framing of subjectivity. Though markedly performative in places, like *Arirang*, Caouette's willingness to share the subjective truth of self-witnessing is sustained through pervasive

and persistent inscriptions of the autobiographical invitation, which manifests in recurrent subjective framing and the assertive and generic documentary practices of filmic autobiography.

Hearing the Body in *Blue*

Derek Jarman, who died in February 1994, was a prolific artist, writer and filmmaker. As a queer, British man with AIDS, Jarman allowed his work to articulate unapologetically his sexual, ideological and political proclivities, often to the detriment of his public and artistic repute. Jarman was a committed and unguarded diarist; even when his illness denied him the capacity to see or write for himself, he accepted the assistance of those closest to him to enable his self-reflections in the months before his death (Peake, 1999). Excerpts from these diaries, coupled with extended passages from Jarman's lyrical and philosophical autobiography *Chroma: A Book of Colour - June '93* (1994), make up the script for the meandering narrative that provides the soundtrack for his final film, *Blue* (1993). Where *Arirang* and *Tarnation* are considered above as documentary limit cases, *Blue* inhabits the outer margins of generic distinction in a number of ways. Unlike both Caouette's and Kim's films, which privilege the visual image of the autobiographical subject and the construction of subjective point-of-view, Jarman's film challenges both the conventions of unilateral production and the filmic representation of autobiographical subjectivity through the renunciation of a visible embodied subject; Jarman instead assembles a palimpsestic and polyphonic testimonial performance of his autobiographical experience with AIDS-related illness over a static blue screen (see Figure 1.7). The self-witnessing agenda of testimony and the inherent plea for empathic relation that underpins the intersubjective pact of filmic autobiography are both evident in Jarman's final film, functioning to incite the testimonial witnessing structure and sanction *Blue*'s inclusion in the present study. Although Jarman's film largely interrogates the first-person 'grammar' of autofilmic testimony that I have described above, it expands the modality of the autofilmic testimonial I/eye to explore the nuances of queer identity and illness in respect to agency, ethics, and empathy to depict a self-witnessing project that privileges bodily experience whilst it refuses embodied subjectivity.



Figure 1.7: *Jarman's blue screen.*

For Jarman: "The image is a prison of the soul" (36:40), a prison he willfully rejects in *Blue* in favour of a fixed blue screen. Consequently, the foremost reason that *Blue* is considered as a limit case is the absence of the embodied subject within the cinematic discourse as a visible prompt to autobiographical engagement, and the diegetic representation of the testimonial I/eye as the visible referent for the real, autobiographical body. The denial of physical, embodied subjectivity complicates the representation of the empathic target as the focal anchor of the cinematic invitation, which in turn interrogates the autobiographical pact and challenges the referential effort of the viewer. However, the absence of the subject/narrating 'I' as object/narrated 'I' within the cinematic frame is a deliberate denial with multiple intersecting agendas within Jarman's testimonial project.

Jarman's failure to appear on screen is purposely defiant and markedly political; choosing not to include his own image is a rejection of a potentially metonymic representation of AIDS victimhood, circumventing his reduction to "a problematically inflected image of the Person With AIDS" (Parsons, 2018: p. 377). Furthermore, the absence of the body interferes with the viewer's innate evaluative impulse, denying them the capacity to interpret physical characteristics upon which we often depend in order to determine the parameters of age, gender, class and race. As Smith and Watson contend, "Cultural discourses determine which aspects of bodies become meaningful [...]. They determine when the body becomes visible, how it becomes visible, and what that visibility means" (2010: p. 38) in the construction of the autobiographical subject's "socio-political body". This body is determined by "a set of cultural attitudes and discourses encoding the public meanings of bodies that underwrite relationships of power" (p. 38). The refusal of an embodied, signified, and therefore codified body obfuscates the viewer's understanding of the subject through established cultural and socio-political discourses, forcing the viewer

to work harder to engage with the subject and steering them to the paratext to enable the reconciliation of the film's testimony with the embodied subject. Consequently, Jarman's film relies upon his status as a prolific artist and politically active public figure to alleviate some of the referential labour involved, whilst still installing the intersubjective pact of autobiographical viewership that leads back to the body, but on his terms.

As an artist and a high-profile gay advocate, Jarman was acutely aware of the pervasive cultural discourse of the late twentieth century in Britain, most evident in the ways he exploited and subverted the patriarchal hegemony of the Thatcherite body politic for the majority of his career. In *Blue*, Jarman "[blends] visionary queer politics with experimental modes of self-representation" (Parsons, 2018: p. 376), an approach that recurs throughout his multimedial, artistic back catalogue, a catalogue which becomes significant as contextual framing for the absent, embodied subject. For example, in *The Angelic Conversation* (1985), Jarman "draws clear distinctions between a brutal present and an ideal past" (Peake, 1999: p. 337) in what Jarman himself describes as "a series of slow-moving sequences through a landscape seen through the windows of an Elizabethan house" in which "Two men find and lose each other" (Jarman, 1997: p. 133). The homosexual relationship depicted in *The Angelic Conversation*, coupled with the quintessentially British landscape in which it is set, provide insight into Jarman's identity and his introspective focus as an artist. Jarman's biographer, Tony Peake, claims that in *The Angelic Conversation* "Jarman wanted to make a film without self-hatred, without the violence and imprisonment implicit in so many gay or homoerotic films", further stating "it remained the film of which [Jarman] was always the most proud, the one he felt most truly represented him" (1999: p. 337). Moreover, many of Jarman's pointedly anti-establishment paintings are explicitly self-referential, particularly those produced in his later years. For example, 'Fuck Me Blind' (1993) encompasses a riposte to the Thatcherite attitudes to homosexuality and the AIDS epidemic in the wake of the Section 28 mandate, and a more intimate reference to his own failing eyesight at the hands of the disease. On a similar theme, 'Morphine' (1992) (see Figure 1.8) is a politically charged response to media homophobia in which Jarman smears photocopies of a tabloid front page 'outing' a soap actor in red and black oil paint with the word 'morphine' etched into the canvas. Jarman stated about this painting: "Pain can be alleviated by morphine but the pain of social ostracism cannot be taken away".¹¹ In a more traditionally autobiographical act, Jarman published *Dancing Ledge* (1984) through which he undertook an unambiguously self-focused literary study; in the book he intended to "write about his sexuality not as one

¹¹ This statement is widely referenced in popular culture, and originally appeared under the painting in the Tate.

of a 'they', but as an 'I'" (Peake, 1999: p. 320), asserting his individuality as part of a community as an emissary instead of a metonymic representative. Indeed, Jarman's body of work is unequivocally reflective of his political and personal perspective, offering essential context for the testimonial register of *Blue*. Accordingly, viewing *Blue* through the testimonial agenda of self-witness, and as a deliberately autobiographical act requires that the viewer "shuttle" (Felman and Laub, 1992) between this historical framing and the film text, as metatextual engagement with Jarman's artistic legacy provides context for his testimony in the absence of the autobiographical body.



Figure 1.8: *Jarman's 'Morphine'*.¹²

As is the case for both Kim and Caouette, as a filmmaker, Jarman's natural testimonial outlet is inevitably filmic, albeit an undeniably artistic and unconventional Jarmanian construction. According to Linda Haverty Rugg: "the absence of a body purposefully engages the spectator in a way that suggests redefinition of subjectivity and the construction of selfhood" (2006: p. x). Rugg observes this effect in Tracy Emin's autobiographical installations *My Bed* and *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With, 1963–1995*, which use material objects to "perform as radical self-exposure without depicting the self

¹² Copyright: Jarman's Estate.

as body” (2006: p. x). Jarman’s autofilmic testimony similarly entails the rejection of bodily representation as the finite measure of the subject:

For accustomed to believing in image, an absolute idea of value, his world
had forgotten the command of essence: Thou Shall Not Create Unto
Thyself Any Graven Image, although you know the task is to fill the empty
page. From the bottom of your heart, pray to be released from image.

(36:03-22)

In the voice track that accompanies the unmoving screen, Jarman denounces the confines of the image, paraphrasing and reappropriating a passage from Exodus (20:4) and thus extending this mandate to the viewer. Whilst the use of biblical language and the imperative “pray” are revealing of Jarman’s religious affiliations, what is most significant is the communicative structure: Jarman implores the viewer to engage with the text in a specific way, to dispense with the image and attend to what the film ‘says’, rather than what it ‘shows’. For Alexandra Parsons this is tantamount to “an imaginative means of enacting the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power refrain: ‘Stop looking at us. Start listening to us’” (2018: p. 377). By telling rather than showing his experience with AIDS-related illness, Jarman “retains a powerful agency” (Parsons, 2018: p. 387), controlling both the manner and the media by which to carry out his act of self-witness. The pervasive monochromatic screen is an auxiliary for the embodied subject, a purposeful “metaphor of self” (Olney, 1980) that anchors Jarman’s experience to the viewing experience, thus administering the phenomenological invitation of autobiography. Colour becomes a conduit for the autobiographical body, and, in conjunction with the testimonial narrative, a visual emblem of bodily experience. Originally conceived as a loop of filmed footage of one of Yves Klein’s paintings, the digital image of ‘International Klein Blue’ was produced as the visual backdrop for Jarman’s testimonial voice, as a literal referent for the numerous monochrome mediations contained within the narrative, and as an oblique and deliberately defiant reminder of the testimonial source: Jarman’s absent, ailing body. In *Blue*, the blue screen *is* Jarman, the inescapable, belligerent image that floods the viewer’s field of vision in place of a politicised physical form that might undermine the autobiographical lamentation of the narrative voice. Parsons argues, “Color becomes a way to bypass image, or language, to prompt direct communion between artist and audience” (2018: p. 375); in *Blue*, the direct communion occurs as a result of the autobiographical invitation in spite of bodily absence, as the blue screen holds an inherent coercive power. For as long as the blue screen holds the viewer’s gaze, “color promotes ethical spectatorship” as “a means to bear witness to the terrible effects of the virus”

(Parsons, 2018: p. 377), which entreats the intersubjective structure of testimonial witnessing.

As the viewer willingly watches the blue screen, they agree to receive Jarman's testimony without the requisite body, inevitably focusing the referential labour on the spoken testimony it foregrounds. The fixed visual stimulus of the blue screen dictates that the audience must concert their attentive efforts on the audio elements of the film, which better designates the audience as "listener" (Laub, 1992: p. 71) rather than viewer. However, this does not diminish the inherent empathic relation of testimonial witnessing, as "For the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, the intimate and total presence of an other – in the position of one who hears" (Laub, 1992: p. 70). For Dori Laub, the listener's unobtrusive presence throughout the process of self-witnessing entails a conscious and conscientious connection, as "there has to be an abundance of holding and of emotional investment in the encounter" (Laub, 1992: p. 71). Viewing *Blue* as an act of self-witness, the viewer/listener willingly accepts Jarman's audiovisual invitation as primarily an 'offer of hearing' rather than seeing.

The testimonial script¹³ for *Blue* is comprised of extracts taken from Jarman's diaries and the 'Into the Blue' chapter of *Chroma* (1994), all of which centre on his autobiographical experience with AIDS-related illness, as the basis of the testimonial act. In print, the narrative asserts the autobiographical 'I' through the traditional unification of author/narrator/protagonist (Lejeune, 1989) and the contractual and referential reconciliation with the autobiographical body. As the witnessing structure assumes that testimony is delivered first-hand, so too does it adopt the tenets of the autobiographical pact; the testimony is contingent upon the reconciliation of the autobiographical 'I' with the testifying body, which in the absence of the embodied subject is dependent on voice as a referential anchor. Smith and Watson claim that "orally performing an autobiographical act minimizes the distances between the narrator and the narratee" (2010: p. 97) as it constitutes a direct and interactive address. But Jarman's autobiographical act is performed by intermediaries including John Quentin, Nigel Terry, and Tilda Swinton instead of Jarman himself in the film. This performative strategy interrupts the direct address, which also subverts the viewer's reconciliation of the voice as the paratextual anchor to the testifying body. The performative nature of Jarman's testimony potentially confounds the witnessing structure, unless the viewer is able to overlook the referential conflict. To successfully achieve this, the viewer must hear the 'I' in the testimony itself, as

¹³ A text of the film's spoken narrative is available at:
<http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/Jarman/JarmanBTx.html>.

asserted directly in the fundamental testimonial missive, “I shall not win the battle against the virus – in spite of the slogans like ‘Living with AIDS’” (15:51), which is unequivocally Jarman’s. Without a visual representation of Jarman’s body to contradict the testifying voice, the viewer is more able to accept the diegetic voice/s of the film as Jarman’s. This suspension of disbelief speaks to the ethical privileging of autobiographical experience as “real” (Schmitt, 2017), which the ethical and empathic engagement with autobiography as testimony dictates. Furthermore, the referential labour of emersion leads back to the autobiographical source, which means that reconciliation of the testimonial voice with the real autobiographical subject is mediated – and indeed, superseded – by the willing acceptance of the autobiographical invitation and the ethical participation in testimonial witnessing that the viewer agrees to when they choose to watch the film.

In *Blue*, empathic relation is facilitated by an inevitable return to the body as the “site of autobiographical knowledge” (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 49) and the “paratextual anchor” (Schmitt, 2017: p. 96) to embodied experience, in spite of the lack of a visible empathic target. According to Tan, the “lack of moving visual stimulus impacts upon the emotional action tendencies often felt in film viewership” (Tan, 1996: p. 74), such as the multidimensional empathic relation triggered by Kim crying in *Arirang*; however, in *Blue* empathic relation is dependent upon the viewer/hearer’s reception of Jarman’s testimony within the witnessing structure described above. In her book *A Theory of Narrative Empathy* (2006), Suzanne Keen explains “the mechanisms underlying empathy” (2006: p. 207) with reference to neuroscience and the bodily, precognitive responses related to our “emotion sharing abilities” (2006: p. 207). Keen goes on to clarify, “Simply hearing a description of an absent other’s actions lights up mirror neuron areas during fMRI imaging of the human brain” (Keen, 2006: p. 208), which reflect in the hearer a physiological response to the experiences of others that happens even when they are unable to see them. What Keen describes is the involuntary ‘feeling with’ of empathic relation that occurs when the account of experience is accepted and understood as real. This empathic relation is particularly potent in autobiographical accounts, when the reality is described as the experience of a real person. Jarman’s descriptions of his body in pain interpellate the viewer to consider their own; this is what Keen refers to as “*broadcast strategic empathy*”, which functions in *Blue* as an appeal to the viewer “to feel with members of a group, by emphasizing common vulnerabilities and hopes through universalizing representations” (original italics, 2006: p. 215). Broadcast strategic empathy assumes the viewer as other, positioned outside of Jarman’s experience, but with whom Jarman wishes to share his experience by way of self-witnessing through relatable scenarios. The largely universal and relatable experience of receiving an injection is just

one example: "The nurse fights to find a vein in my right arm. We give up after five attempts. Would you faint if someone stuck a needle into your arm? I've got used to it - but I still shut my eyes" (16:44-57). Jarman literally asks the viewer as witness to consider their own bodily reaction to the familiar procedure. Despite the fact that the viewer is unable to see the metal piercing the skin, they are able to conceive of the experience through empathic bodily resonance, again forcing the referential focus back to the body, not as other, but as similar to our own. However, Jarman's personal trauma is pervasive in even the most arbitrary descriptions, indicative of his ongoing contention with his own mortality:

The drip stings. A lump swells up in my arm. Out comes the drip. An electric shock sparks up my arm. How can I walk away with a drip attached to me? How am I going to walk away from this?

(19:10-30)

Within the context of his illness, the relatable medical processes Jarman describes are reframed as "futile care" (Smith, 2000), capable of alleviating some of his symptoms, but incapable of saving him from his inevitable death. Consequently, Jarman's broadcast strategic empathy functions at two levels fundamental to autofilmic testimony: he asks that the viewer 'feel with' him in response to his autobiographical invitation in an act of empathic relation, and invites the viewer to simultaneously and ethically bear witness to his testimonial act of self-witness.

There are multiple empathic strategies at work in Jarman's testimony, as the film's audience is invited to feel with him specifically, and more broadly to empathise with others suffering with AIDS-related illnesses, some of whom may be watching his film. For Keen, "*ambassadorial strategic empathy* addresses chosen others with the aim of cultivating their empathy for the in-group, often to a specific end" (original italics, Keen, 2006: p. 215). Jarman's 'in-group' consists of those who have died, or are dying from AIDS-related illness. He references his friends by name, inviting the viewer to extend their empathy to them:

David ran home panicked on the train from Waterloo, brought back exhausted and unconscious to die that night. Terry who mumbled incoherently into his incontinent tears [...]. Howard turned slowly to stone, petrified day by day, his mind imprisoned in a concrete fortress until all we could hear were his groans on the telephone circling the globe.

(38:38-39:20)

By naming real others whom he identifies as members of his afflicted collective, Jarman cultivates the viewer's empathy for them, and by extension others, who are facing the inevitable mortality of AIDS in a deliberately ambassadorial gesture. At the same time, Jarman's descriptions of the experiences of the collective functions as "*bounded strategic empathy*", which, as Keen explains, "operates within an in-group, stemming from experiences of mutuality and leading to feeling with familiar others" (original italics, 2006: p. 215). Evidently, these empathic strategies are by no means mutually exclusive, as Jarman's inclusive testimony makes multilateral empathic appeals to viewers who may or may not be familiar with the realities of his condition. Jarman's persistent references to the bodily processes of AIDS-related illness are constant reminders of the bodily suffering it imposes, and the insurmountable trauma of the terminal condition that affected all who were afflicted at that time. The multiple empathic strategies in *Blue* foreground the advocacy inherent in Jarman's self-witnessing autofilmic testimony.

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When Jarman's autobiographical writings become the voice of his filmic testimony, mapped onto a brilliant aquamarine screen, the viewer is invited to bear witness without the visual crutch of the embodied subject. However, Jarman's purposeful withholding of the visual referential anchor commands a particularly emersive engagement from the viewer, a process by which the viewer must willingly look beyond the cinematic frame to the paratextual context in which the embodied subject exists. For Jarman, testimonial witnessing must breach the limits of filmic representations of subjectivity in order to effectively communicate the reality of his experience with AIDS-related illness, a reality that for him is unequivocally political. Jarman's testimony encompasses living with, and dying of, AIDS, at a time when empathy for him, and the British gay community, was in short supply; this personal perspective is inevitably reflected in his oeuvre of self-reflexive works. Jarman's refusal to metonymically embody AIDS victimhood on screen is not a disavowal of the illness' potency; rather, it is a deliberately political gesture by which he refuses to become a spectacle in favour of his multiply representative role as a spokesman. Through his personal experience, Jarman commands attention and empathy for a community of which he was proud to be a part, and which he was reluctant to leave.

By telling rather than showing his experience, Jarman deviates from documentary and autobiographical filmic conventions, but successfully facilitates the empathic relation of the autobiographical invitation by entreating the intersubjective witnessing structure of testimony. For Kate Higginson "*Blue* negotiates, and essentially stages a dialogue between, the material realities of AIDS and a desire to escape the same" (2008: p. 80)

and this is an inherent tension at the core of Jarman's autofilmic testimonial endeavour. The material realities of AIDS-related illness are reflected in the limited visual stimulus, as well as through the descriptions of arbitrary medical procedures that inevitably fail to save him. Nevertheless, Jarman's testimonial invitation to feel with him is a lyrical mediation on living as a gay man with AIDS in Britain at a particularly resistant cultural moment, which deploys the artistic and filmic media with which he was so familiar to elicit the ethical witnessing he felt he was denied in real life. Whether defined as political performance art, adapted autobiography or documentary, *Blue*'s status as Jarman's self-witnessing autofilmic testimony is determined by our willingness to bear ethical and empathic witness to the subjective truth it presents.

The autofilmic testimonies analysed in this chapter demonstrate the ways in which film can issue an intimate and autobiographical invitation to bear witness. As self-made and self-reflexive films, *Arirang*, *Tarnation*, and *Blue* offer subjective perspectives into the particularities of autobiographical experience, drawing historical and paratextual context into the filmic discourse in creative, performative, and discursive ways. The films are unified in their self-witnessing agenda, in spite of their differing filmic constructions, with each film asserting a distinct, subjective offer of seeing/hearing. In *Arirang*, Kim capitalises on the recognisable conventions of documentary and filmic autobiography to assert his first-person perspective, whilst interrogating generic boundaries through stylistic strategies that allow him to bring historical and contextual details into the filmic narrative. Caouette retains the designation documentary, but makes use of lyrical edits and intertextual citations to construct a coherent account of autobiographical experience that requires the viewer to overlook authorial intervention in order to understand the relational configuration of self-formation. In *Blue*, Jarman unapologetically invites the viewer to look beyond the visual stimulus of the film, in a self-witnessing project that requires a willing engagement with the metatextual framing of the filmic narrative in order to reconcile the distinctly personal and political context of the testimonial project. Though the films analysed in this chapter deploy unique narrative strategies to assert their testimonial truth, each of them evinces an inherent invitation through their willingness to share it. As a result, viewership comes to constitute acceptance of the subject's autobiographical and testimonial invitation, which requires a willing, ethical and empathic engagement with the filmic narrative that can reconcile the subject's account with their real lived experience.

My analysis in this chapter introduces important critical and theoretical approaches to autobiographical and testimonial narratives that illuminate the parameters and protocols of

self-witnessing on film. The ways in which subjects use performative strategies to convey autobiographical experience provide a significant insight into the specific contexts of testimonial telling, such as Kim's self-imposed isolation, Caouette's shared experience with his mother, and Jarman's deliberate, political defiance. Issues relating to embodiment become particularly pertinent in visual media, as cinematic I-witnessing largely entails showing and seeing as well as telling. The subject on screen is the central focus of autobiographical and testimonial films, and accordingly, their bodies become textual surfaces and referential anchors for their narratives and experience. Related to embodiment within the scope of visual narratives of witness, empathic engagement is often prompted and elicited through facial affect and subjective framing, as seen in *Arirang* and *Tarnation*, and deliberately withheld in *Blue*. However, *Blue* does illustrate the way that voice, as another significant characteristic of subjective narratives, can be asserted and mobilised to instantiate an intersubjective connection with the viewer and encourage empathic relation. Finally, the social and relational contexts of subjective experience are inevitably implicated in autobiographical and testimonial accounts, whether willingly omitted, as in *Arirang*, overtly asserted as in *Tarnation*, or implicitly invoked as they are in *Blue*. Self-witnessing through filmic media requires the subject to represent the reality of experience, which necessitates the introduction and negotiation of the multiple and interrelated dimensions of subjectivity within their narratives of witness in order to show and tell the testimonial truth.

Trauma is never exclusively personal.

Leigh Gilmore

2. Autofilmic Advocacy: Testimonial Remembering and Not Forgetting in Jennifer Fox's *The Tale* and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis*

As established in Chapter One, the construction of the testimonial I/eye in film is contingent upon the recognisable codes and conventions of subjective self-witnessing, facilitated by both documentary practices and the ethical and empathic witnessing structure engendered by the autobiographical invitation. This chapter will advance this critical framework to explore the machinations of memory and representation in two explicitly testimonial films, Jennifer Fox's *The Tale* (2018) and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2007). By incorporating critical perspectives from testimony, trauma, and autobiography studies, I analyse each film's multi-layered witnessing structure, which includes production, viewership, and cultural impact. The analysis includes the exploration of intra- and extra-textual strategies of empathy, which contribute to the ethical and empathic mode of viewership that underpins cinematic I-witnessing. Ultimately, the analysis concludes that the empathic relation autofilmic testimony invites is tantamount to ethical witnessing, which persists as a form of activism beyond the viewing experience.

Both *The Tale* and *Persepolis* are explicitly – and collaboratively – constructed as feature films, in contrast with the unilateral and documentary practices considered in Chapter One; but, in each case the film project is written and directed by the autobiographical subject who retains both authorial and auteurial agency, thus preserving the autobiographical invitation. As will become clear, the filmmaker-subjects, Jennifer Fox and Marjane Satrapi, craft their testimonies from the dual positions of self-witness and “witness to the process of witnessing” (Laub, 1995: p. 62) to facilitate intricate networks of empathy within and through the intersubjective witnessing structure of autofilmic testimony. Furthermore, I argue that autofilmic testimony's empathic potential as a form of self-witnessing can develop within both a relational and representational model. As such, the films explored in this chapter advance the critical purview of autofilmic testimony towards the possibility of therapeutic creative practice and the empathic potential of engagement with the same.

As an award-winning screenwriter, director, cinematographer and producer, Jennifer Fox has made a career of bearing witness. Fox won the Grand Prize for Documentary at the

Sundance Film Festival with her debut project *Beirut: The Last Home Movie* (1987), a *cinéma vérité* film in which Fox accompanies her former classmate, Gaby Bustros to Beirut to visit Bustros' family in the midst of a civil war. As someone who is familiar with both sides of the camera lens, Fox is well versed in the dialogic relationship that film invites, having turned the camera upon herself in both *Beirut*, and the curation of the documentary film series *Flying: Confessions of a Free Woman* (2006): a collaborative, relational memoir project that bears witness to "modern female life" around the world (Fox in Bussel, 2007). In witnessing the testimonies of other women whilst making *Flying: Confessions*, and rediscovering an essay she wrote as a child, Fox was compelled to re-evaluate a relationship from her past, which brought to the fore a traumatic personal truth. Fox's most recent film, *The Tale* (2018), explores this realisation of repressed child sexual abuse, in which she repurposes her documentary acuity in the construction of an introspective, narrative film with extremely sensitive and provocative content. In a cinematic act of self-witness, Fox interrogates the machinations of trauma and memory to produce a raw and culturally significant autofilmic testimony. The film traverses the parallel timelines of past and present, through explorations of memory and its failures, to ultimately reconcile the truth of traumatic childhood experience and its lasting impact upon the subject's life and relationships.

Like Fox, Marjane Satrapi is professionally engaged in numerous creative disciplines; as an author, cartoonist, screenwriter and director, Satrapi's career boasts a catalogue of projects that exploit her complementary competencies in predominantly visual media in numerous languages. Satrapi's animated autofilmic testimony *Persepolis* (2007) is adapted from her comic autobiography of the same name, originally published in French in four volumes between 2000 and 2003. The comic *Persepolis* won many prestigious accolades including the Angoulême *Coup de Coeur* Award and the American Library Association's 'Best Book for Young Adults', with the film receiving yet further critical acclaim, winning the Cannes Film Festival's Jury Prize (2007) and making Satrapi the first woman to be nominated for the 'Academy Award for Best Animated Feature Film of the Year'. Satrapi's feature-length animation assumes a similar, oscillating temporal structure to *The Tale*, allowing Satrapi to both articulate and evaluate her childhood perspective in tandem with the additional retrospective insight of having survived both the cultural and geographical upheaval she experienced as a consequence of the Islamic Revolution, whilst also illuminating both the personal and collective consequences of the militant Shah regime and its legacy in her native home, Teheran.

Each of the films mobilises self-witness as autofilmic testimony, which not only postulates personal, autobiographical experience, but also bears witness to the scope and scale of

the creators' respective traumas in a wider context. For Fox, her autofilmic testimony sheds light on the often effaced, yet endemic issue of child sexual abuse, and the intricate and intersubjective exercise of remembering forgotten trauma, whilst Satrapi allows her autofilmic testimony to bear witness to the cultural trauma imposed upon the Iranian collective, incorporating the historical and experiential accounts of others, in a remedial representation of "not forgetting" (Chute, 2008: p. 94). The subjects' decisions to use narrative filmic forms offer further insight into each woman's process of self-witnessing and production, and in each case, the specificity of the personal constitutes advocacy for like others, which further manifests as a form of activism in the paratextual framing and reception of the film.

Telling Tales: Mediating Memories

Whilst making the documentary series *Flying: Confessions of a Free Woman*, Jennifer Fox rediscovered a middle-school essay that made her rethink her first sexual experience. As she reconsidered her childhood memories from a position of adult retrospect, Fox came to realise that what she had considered a relationship was in actual fact sexual abuse, committed by two people whom she had respected and loved. The belated realisation was the impetus for an autobiographical project that saw her move away from the vocational mode of documentary to construct a narrative film of self-witness. When asked to explain *The Tale* in an interview, Fox stated "It's about unravelling denial, using myself as the red thread" (Fox in Reilly, 2018), a statement that compounds the significance of her self-witnessing project within a testimonial context on both a personal and a cultural level. As a retrospective act of self-witness, the production of *The Tale* allowed Fox to address suppressed memories of childhood sexual abuse, leading her to question herself and her ideologies in the present in order to confront her past and reshape her future.

As the keystone of the creative process of self-witness, the essay is the autobiographical artefact that galvanised Fox's testimonial enquiry, as indicated by the title-card at the film's end, which reads: "Based on 'The Tale' written by Jenny Fox, age 13" (1:49:03). Though 'The Tale' was written as a scholastic creative writing assignment, the first-person narrative retains the essayistic and autobiographical posture of introspection, articulating first-hand experience within a progressive and evaluative framework. The essay's totemic presence within the film serves as a reminder to the viewer that the film is the product of real-world self-witness, further underscored by Fox's retention of her own name for the central character (played by Laura Dern) – a deliberate decision intended to authenticate

the personal and testimonial pedigree of the film. On the film's official website (2018), Fox attests:

By leaving the Jennifer character's name as mine, I am there to tell
[naysayers], 'no, this really happened. And yes, I did really feel 'love' for
these people as they robbed me of my trust and betrayed and hurt me'.

Fox's use of her own name is a deliberate gesture that inscribes autobiographical intent, but also serves to counter the pervasive cultural doubt that beleaguers the disclosure of sexual violence. In her book *Tainted Witness: Why We Doubt What Women Say About Their Lives* (2017), life-writing scholar Leigh Gilmore contends that in contemporary culture, the inherent truth claim of female testimony is often questioned, as a consequence of pervasive patriarchal discourses of power within testimonial settings. Though not completely exempt from this cultural bias, Gilmore argues that "Autobiography is more flexible than legal testimony" as it allows women to exploit "its literary elasticity to assert legitimacy" (p. 9). By placing an autobiographical document at the centre of the cinematic discourse, and designating a nominal avatar as representative of the autobiographical 'I', Fox is able to command the contractual invitation of autobiography to reinforce *The Tale*'s testimonial efficacy.

In the film, Jennifer Fox's testimonial invitation is immediately issued through the voiceover that precedes the opening scene, in the phrase "The story you are about to see is true... as far as I know" (0:45). This introductory missive is indicative of three key considerations within the context of autofilmic testimony: the installation of the testimonial 'I', the declarative truth claim of testimony, and the acknowledgement of the fallibility of subjective memory within the context of traumatic testimony. As discussed in Chapter One with reference to Derek Jarman's *Blue*, the voice is the referential anchor of the embodied subject and "target of empathy" (Schmitt, 2017: p. 121) of autobiographical discourse, in this case the testimonial 'I', which extends the relational invitation to empathic witnessing to the viewer by asserting the truth claim of testimony. Within the same statement, the testimonial 'I' pronounces "the epistemic dilemma of testimony" (Krämer, 2016: p. 32), which indicates both the impossibility of the verification of traumatic experience and the caveat of its incommunicability. *The Tale* holds both testimonial truth and traumatic memory in critical tension throughout, as Fox attempts to bear witness to the circumstances of her childhood sexual abuse in dialogue with the revelatory rationale of adult retrospect as a performative reenactment of self-witness.

The Tale is a manifestation of "autobiographical portraiture", which "is a way of offering a performative testimony about the manner in which personhood is constituted in relation to

experiences of trauma” (Snooks, 2017: p. 399). By extension, the screenplay¹⁴ for the film is the structural framework for Fox’s performative testimony, as an antecedent and retrospective act of self-witness that contributes to *The Tale*’s testimonial offer of showing and telling. The assembly of the screenplay is suggestive of the scriptotherapeutic practice of “writing out and writing through traumatic experience” (Henke, 1998: p. xii), as the process by which Fox was able to construct a coherent account of the labour of self-witness as the basis of her autofilmic testimony. The screenplay is an all-encompassing account of the memory work that self-witnessing entails, the manner by which Fox recalled and reimagined her experience, and the authentication of self-reflexive representation inscribed with the requisite real name of the autobiographical ‘I’ (Lejeune, 1989). Realised as a film, the self-witnessing agenda of the screenplay transmits Fox’s testimonial invitation through an intersubjective pact with the viewer, inviting them to bear witness to her traumatic past, but also to the process of self-witness that facilitates testimony.

As mentioned in Chapter One, the autobiographical subject must address the discrepancy between the experiencing ‘I’ of the past and the narrating ‘I’ of the present within the self-witnessing narrative of the film, which for Kim involved the performative installation of a “coaxer/coercer” (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 64). In essence, testimony is the revelation of a traumatic experience, which “does not exist until it can be articulated and heard by a sympathetic listener” (Gilmore, 2001: p. 6), whose role can also involve prompting the subject to talk. Kim’s narrative emerges through a stylised interview, whilst Fox portrays a similar coercive paradigm in *The Tale*. At the beginning of the film, the adult Jennifer’s¹⁵ refusal to define her childhood story as disclosure, and ultimately accept her experience as traumatic, complicates testimony’s relational dynamic, confounding the invitation to bear witness. After finding the essay, Jennifer’s mother, Nettie (Ellen Burstyn), calls multiple times in the film’s early scenes, expressing concern for her daughter and attempting to initiate the witnessing paradigm (2:30-3:01). At this point Jennifer avoids contact, but is visibly unsettled by the implications of her mother’s concern; when questioned about her preoccupation by her fiancé, Patrick (played by Common), she explains “sorry, I was just thinking about my mom. She’s been calling and she read this story I wrote as a kid about my first boyfriend, and I hadn’t told her about it because he was older, so she’s beside herself trying to reach me” (5:21). Nettie attempts to coax

¹⁴ A copy of the original screenplay was generously provided for reference purposes by Associate Producer Stefanie Diaz, on behalf of Jennifer Fox, in support of this research.

¹⁵ Jennifer/Jenny are used when referring to the film’s characters throughout to prevent confusion.

Jennifer's testimony,¹⁶ but Jennifer dismisses her mother's concerns; however, the sharp flashbacks that follow Nettie's calls constitute "an instantly recognizable device to mark a traumatic return" (Luckhurst, 2008, p. 180), as these flashbacks are "the unconscious language of repetition through which trauma initially speaks" (Gilmore, 2001, p. 7) within the film's self-witnessing narrative. These fragmentary flashes of memory invade both Jennifer's work (3:45) and sex with her partner (4:30) before the receipt of the story triggers a more coherent flashback to the environment in which it was written (5:57-6:52). The original school assignment instructions "Like Tom Sawyer: Write a fiction story set in your hometown" are visible within the frame as the younger Jenny's voiceover accompanies the subjective viewpoint of her pen strokes on the pink paper (6:44), the same paper that Jennifer is holding – and reading – in the narrative present. The coincidence of voiceover in tandem with the production of self-referential writing is a recognisable cinematic trope of first-person representation, used to instantiate the narrating 'I' of the autobiographical discourse, further inscribing the testimonial voice and its cognisant empathic invitation. The presence of the document in the hands of both Jenny and Jennifer unifies the temporally separate iterations of the narrating 'I' as a singular autobiographical narrator. The document itself, routinely shown in the possession of both Jenny and Jennifer, provides a dialogic link between the parallel past and present narratives within the oscillating structure of self-witness. The cinematic medium allows for both young Jenny and the adult Jennifer to occupy the 'speaking' position of the narrating 'I' within the linear cinematic discourse, even though the child is simultaneously representative of both the narrated 'I' and the experiencing 'I' of the past within an autobiographical project. Consequently, the bilateral cinematic construction of the testimonial 'I' allows Fox to invite the viewer to empathise with herself as the real-world subject at multiple junctures along the timeline of experience, by presenting the perspective of the child as the events unfold, and additionally the evaluative narrating 'I' of the remembering adult who attempts to reconcile the two narratives as one coherent testimony.

When Jennifer is again shown reading the essay, alone in her New York loft, the voiceover articulates the words as she reads them, situating her as the narrating 'I' of the diegetic present, and reframing the remembered Jenny as the narrated 'I' of Jennifer's past: "I'd like to begin this story by telling you something so beautiful-". The jump-cut to a

¹⁶ See my analysis of *Arirang* for a more detailed definition of the "coaxer/coercer" (Smith and Watson: 2010: p. 64).

flashback of a teenaged Jenny (Jessica Sarah Flaum) is connected by the merging of their voices as Jenny takes up the voiceover. She reads:

I've met two very special people whom I've come to love dearly. Imagine a woman who is married and a man who is divorced, sharing their lives in close friendship. Loving each other with all their souls, yet not being close with their bodies. Get this, I'm part of them both. I'm lucky enough to be able to share in their love. When I'm with them, the earth seems to shake and tremble-

(9:07-47)

The young Jenny's reading narrates an imagined vignette, which serves to introduce the viewer to Mrs G. (Elizabeth Debicki) and Bill (Jason Ritter), both of whom smile directly to the camera outside their respective houses, before running in sync through the woods, and ultimately gazing up at a beaming Jenny seated atop a horse (see Figure 2.1). The younger Jenny's voice is replaced by Jennifer's, as the wide shot shows the older woman lifting the essay's first page, completing the sentence, "-and often I'm afraid I'll fall off of it" (9:50). In this instance the flashback is representative of Jennifer's idealised memory, untainted by the reality of her traumatic past and preserved as the preferred context for her exploratory essay. But, the essay is both the bridge between past and present, and the axis around which the transient self-witnessing narrative revolves – both in the film, and in the process of its construction. After reading the essay, Jennifer chooses to "sit with [her] own memories" (10:35), which eventually compels her to seek validation through the comparison of her own memories with those of others who were present in her past, just as Fox did.



Figure 2.1: *Jenny (Flaum) atop her horse with Mrs. G and Bill.*

As a child, Fox veiled her testimonial disclosure in a school assignment, which, as the film shows, prompted her teacher to speculate on the inspiration for her story: "If what you talk

about here were accurate I would say that you had been taken advantage of by older people. But, clearly you have a fine, full set of emotions blossoming into womanhood” (10:12-28). Though posited initially as a story crafted in response to an academic prompt, the essayistic purview of ‘The Tale’ is substantiated by Jenny’s “intellectual, emotional and physiological” (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 276) reflections, as suggested by her teacher’s evaluation, which become more apparent as the film progresses. What becomes clear is testimony’s contingency upon both an *explicit* truth claim and an invited ethical witness; but, as a consequence of Jenny’s presentation of the story as fiction, the testimonial structure of witnessing was uninitiated in her past and the “traumatic truth” of testimony as “traced through the perverse interplay of fact and fiction” (Luckhurst, 2008: p. 143) was effectively concealed. Jennifer’s memory installs the belief that the story is fiction, which motivates her dismissive behaviour in the present. However, contrary to Jennifer’s “defensive dissociation” (Luckhurst, 2008: p. 88), Fox’s persistent use of flashback foreshadows the forthcoming exploration of traumatic experience as a signal to the viewer that, in spite of Jennifer’s recalcitrance, her testimonial invitation manifests piecemeal through memory work, witnessing, and the viewer’s precedent acceptance of the film’s autobiographical register.

For Fox, the process of self-witness became a relational exercise, necessitating the engagement of others as witnesses to events she had recalibrated in the story of her own history. This labour is represented in *The Tale*, as Jennifer traverses the country in an attempt to clarify the details of her childhood that are obscured by the conflict between the essay and her memories. Jennifer seeks to resolve this tension primarily by speaking with those who were present at Mrs. G’s farm. These *adjacent witnesses* provide vital context for Jennifer’s warped memories, as they remind her how her age and her character rendered her more vulnerable than she remembers. When visiting with Becky (Jodi Long), a former campmate at Mrs. G’s equestrian program, Jennifer is shown photographs of her time at Mrs. G’s farm, which confirm her memories of the other girls but, as she is not in any of the shots, leave a question mark over her remembered self. Becky tells her “You were such a tiny, little thing. So much smaller than Franny and I. [...] you almost looked like a little boy. [...] you were so afraid, you barely said two words” (16:02-12). Jennifer’s close-framed reaction registers her confusion, as the earlier flashback shows her as a lithe and developing young woman in her mind’s eye. The encounter with Becky drives Jennifer to pursue further confirmation, which she looks for in her mother’s photo albums. On finding a print that accords with her memory, the close-up reveals the young woman from Jennifer’s flashback pictured with her horse (17:00). However, Jennifer’s mother points out that the photo she has found is of her at age fifteen in 1975, redirecting her to a

photo from 1973 (17:15). The photo confirms Becky's description, featuring a much younger and smaller Jenny (Isabelle Nélisse), whilst the reverse shot closely frames Jennifer's failure to comprehend the discrepancy in her own memory. This encounter demonstrates the way that photographs "alter the ways that we conceive of our selves" (Anderst, 2013: p. 226), as the earlier flashback is then replayed, this time with the younger Jenny at the centre of the action. The way that Fox utilises photographs within the cinematic discourse is reminiscent of Caouette's intertextual practice in *Tarnation*, whereby family snapshots are deployed as autobiographical artefacts within the curation process of the documentary project. The photos make it clear that Jenny is far more reserved and juvenile than Jennifer initially remembered, and as Jenny repeats the first line of the titular essay, the tone of the previously romanticised story shifts towards impropriety, lending credence to Nettie's earlier reaction and forcing Jennifer to further question the context of the relationship she remembers so fondly.

The revelation of Jenny's prepubescent body alters both Jennifer's and the viewer's perception of the power relations between Jenny and her adult lovers, exposing the underlying issue of consent, and confirming the suspicions implied by Nettie early in the film. This adjustment unquestionably designates Jenny (and by extension, Fox) a "vulnerable subject" within the autobiographical discourse, by virtue of her status as a minor (Couser, 2004: p. xii). Consequently, the ethical imperative of bearing witness is redoubled for the viewer, as the implication of child sexual abuse irrevocably manifests. The substitution of the younger actress in the role of Jenny also prompts a shift in the viewer's empathic engagement with the autobiographical narrative; when Jenny was depicted as a 'blossoming teenager', the relationship she described could be construed as her first foray into adult romance, as a recognisable heteronormative, coming-of-age experience. However, as the relationship is reframed as the abuse of an unwitting pre-adolescent, the invitation to empathy functions on two different levels: "ambassadorial strategic empathy" (Keen, 2006: p. 215), which appeals to the viewer as witness on behalf of the child, and by extension, children like her who have experienced similar abuse; and "bounded strategic empathy", which is contingent upon the "mutuality" of experience (Keen, 2006: p. 215) whereby viewers who may have experienced similar events in their own childhoods feel a kinship with Jenny (and simultaneously Fox) as fellow survivors. As the earlier flashback vignette is repeated, the young Jenny's demeanour is markedly different; she is more reserved, less confident, and visibly in awe of Mrs. G, as she attests in the voiceover, "She was the most beautiful woman I had ever met. Every girl wanted to be just like her. Becky and Franny did. I did" (18:30-45). The extended flashback scene shows Jenny perceptibly unsure of herself in the company of the other girls at Mrs. G's

camp – both of whom are physically more mature (18:43) – and eager to comply with Mrs. G's stringent training regime, which includes cross-country running with Bill. Mrs. G's introductory words are darkly prophetic: "Bill is an excellent coach. He will teach you to go beyond the complaints of your bodies" (18:59), as Bill rounds the corner in slow motion causing Jenny to stand bolt upright (19:06). As Bill introduces himself to the girls in turn, Jenny is submissive, a dynamic that is further installed by Bill's directive during the cohort's run: "I am Nouga, you are Neets. When I say Nouga, you say Neets!" (19:35-38). As the other girls drop back in exhaustion, Jenny forces herself to keep pace with Bill, continuing with the call and response chant "Nouga – Neets" (19:27-20:03) as she obediently follows him through the woods alone. By presenting Jenny as she was in contrast with the way Jennifer remembered her, Fox dispels any doubt regarding the nature of the relationship, which purposely prompts further inquiry as to the circumstances that led an introverted, but eager-to-please child to victimhood, and a seemingly content adult to repress the truth of her childhood exploitation.



Figure 2.2: *Jennifer speaks to Jenny (Nélisse) in the mirror.*

Seen through flashbacks, the relationship with Mrs. G and Bill becomes routine, with Jenny spending every weekend at Mrs. G's ranch where she keeps her horse. But, when Bill eventually suggests that Jenny stay with him without Mrs. G, Jenny is visibly stricken, although Mrs. G. creates the illusion that the decision to stay is Jenny's (47:17). In the voiceover Jennifer is heard asking "What did I say? I don't remember" (47:29-35), highlighting the fallibility of traumatic memory. Jennifer looks to the essay as an *aide memoire*, searching the pages for an answer (47:46): "Did I say yes?" (47:50). From off screen Jennifer questions Jenny, who appears to be conversing with her older self through her reflection in the mirror (47:51-48:58) (see Figure 2.2), a strategy of filmic autobiography that for Leah Anderst "can reveal an autobiographer's empathy with [herself] in the past" (Anderst, 2019: p. 82). This scene is representative of a specific empathetic "track" between the autobiographer and her narrating 'I', Jennifer, which

extends to the experiencing 'I', Jenny (see Anderst, 2015: p. 279) and to the viewer as willing witness. Jennifer's reflection appears in the mirror next to Jenny's, as she directs her to the essay as evidence that Jenny did not want to stay. Jenny, again, denounces the story as fiction, levelling the accusation that Jennifer has become "like all of them" (48:49) in trying to control her, before leaving Bill's bathroom enraged. Intercut with close shots of Jennifer reading the essay, the flashback demonstrates the way Bill's 'relationship' with Jenny crosses a vital line, as Jennifer – and likewise the viewer – are forced to look on, helpless to intervene. Essentially, both Jennifer and the viewer must bear witness to the traumatic memory, sharing the same empathic track that leads back to the experiencing 'I' of the child within the text. Concurrently, the viewer is engaged at an additional empathic level, through the emersive (Schmitt, 2017) reconciliation of Fox's filmic counterparts with the living autobiographical subject outside of the text. The viewer simultaneously feels empathy for the multiple entities of the testimonial 'I' on screen – that is both the experiencing 'I' of the child as narrated *and* the narrating 'I' Jennifer as she remembers – both of whom are representative of the real-word self-witness, Fox. Bill asks Jenny to read provocative poetry aloud and when her nerves make her hands shake, he apologises that he left it too late to light the fire, fetching her a blanket instead. The subjective camera adopts the remembering Jennifer's point-of-view, panning from Bill to the fireplace and back again. This subjective manoeuvre reveals that the fire that was burning just seconds before in the reconstructed memory, was in truth dead (50:44), a detail that frames Bill's subsequent request to share the blanket as a deliberate ruse enabling him to get closer to Jenny. As the viewer shares Jennifer's subjective perspective, they see the way she 'corrects' the details of her memory, which simultaneously reframes Bill's concern as coercion. Bill tactically manipulates Jenny, stating "I want to save you from all those stupid young boys out there. I think you are perfect" before asking "Jenny, would you do something for me? Would you let me see you? [...] Do you want to take your shirt off?" (52:45-53:18). Though Jenny is visibly reluctant, she complies; however, Bill soon escalates beyond looking. Jenny's complete submission is depicted just a few scenes later as Bill 'coaches' Jenny through his attempt to penetrate her: "Just breathe... It's okay...Not yet...We have to keep stretching you open slowly. No young boy would ever do this for you" (1:01:02-1:01:45). Bill's reassuring words are discordant with his violent actions, contributing to Jenny's misapprehension of their inappropriate sexual contact as intimacy, which, as Jennifer confirms throughout the course of the filmic narrative, derails her natural, sexual awakening and robs her of the ability to form lasting relationships (1:07:20 and 1:26:30). A close shot of Jenny's face intercut with a reverse shot of Bill on top of her illustrates her agonising resolve in response to her rape, as her voiceover explains: "I find that I trust him so much, I never realise where he's leading me. Once

we're that far, I don't know how to say no. I love him. He loves me" (1:00:52-1:01:31). Jenny's words drive home her childish misunderstanding of consent, forging the connection between what begins as the innocent trust in her running coach, whom she follows for miles through the woods, to her eventual manipulation into an exploitative cycle of abuse that she is unable to recognise or stop; this is the basis of Jennifer's ongoing mischaracterisation of the relationship as complicit. After failing to enter Jenny, Bill places her hand under the blanket before pushing her head down (1:02:03-1:02:11), further emphasising the aspect of coercion, after which she lays next to him, abject as he sleeps. The dissonance of Jenny's juvenile body beside her adult abuser resonates in the high-angled shot, forcing the viewer to reflect on the horror of the experience that Jenny fails to comprehend. The sexual scenes between Jenny and Bill are purposely the most difficult to watch, as they unflinchingly represent the reality of child sexual abuse at the core of Fox's self-witnessing project. In what is undeniably the pivotal revelation of the autofilmic testimony for both Jennifer and the viewer, Fox denounces the un-representability and unspeakability of trauma, bringing both into unambiguous, embodied focus.

Fox felt strongly about including the explicit and sensitive sexual content in *The Tale* in order to preserve the integrity of traumatic experience within the testimonial act of self-witness, stating "It was a deal breaker to take it out" (Fox in Galuppo, 2018). However, choosing to keep these scenes raised a number of creative and ethical concerns, further complicated by her multiple roles within the witnessing structure. Fox initially experienced resistance from financiers and cinematographers, all of whom deemed the sexual content too difficult to address (Galuppo, 2018). But, Fox persevered, exhausting her personal connections to amass the necessary financial and creative support for the film, leveraged by her own personal investment. As both the subject (self-witness) and filmmaker (witness to witnessing), Fox negotiates the ethical imperative of bearing witness from each perspective, both of which must contend with trauma's innate resistance to representation (Caruth, 2016). In her coalescent roles of self-witness and autobiographical subject, Fox is compelled to represent her experience as accurately as she is able, in line with her personal, autofilmic testimonial agenda. Still, the necessary reenactment of the traumatic episode presents an ethical, representational dilemma. Fox resolves this issue by casting an adult body double to take the place of Nélisse, the actress in the role of young Jenny, in all scenes of a sexual nature, as confirmed by the disclaimer in the end credits (1:49:10), using arbitrary prompts to illicit Nélisse's pained expressions for the close shots (Nicholson, 2018). As director, Fox ensures the substitution is imperceptible on screen (as in the rape scene described above) using the Kuleshov effect – an editing technique whereby separate images are strategically shown in sequence to produce meaning – to

facilitate a credible representation of traumatic experience without destabilising the autobiographical integrity of the testimonial 'I', and further, protecting the young actress from an inappropriate situation on set. Consequently, remaining sensitive to the unavoidable consternation around representations of sexual violence, Fox successfully navigates the ethical imperative of bearing witness without compromising the moral or testimonial boundaries of representation.

Fox acknowledged the affective power of the film and the potential impact that inviting the viewer to bear witness could have. Instead of issuing the film through theatres, Fox struck a worldwide deal with HBO that would bypass cinematic release and bring the film directly to the home-viewing arena, making *The Tale* more accessible for a broad range of viewers. Fox stated:

It has always been my intent to find an engaged distribution partner who deeply understands the wide reach of the project, not just as a film but for the impact it can have on a larger global conversation [...]. In a world in which stories like mine have often been pushed into the darkness, no one had been better at shining a light on storytelling and important issues than HBO.

(Fox in Galuppo, 2018)

This move also enabled Fox to authorise what are listed on the film's website as "outreach screenings" by charitable organisations, academic institutions and activist groups throughout the world, from Stellenbosch to Seoul. Recognising the film's affective potential, the screening list is preceded by the directive:

THE TALE is a movie like none we've ever experienced on this topic. It opens our eyes, hearts, and minds. The film is particularly effective when watched and talked about in small or large groups, in the classroom, in the office, in screening rooms and with your colleagues, fellow students, and friends. We invite you to sign up to host free public screenings of **THE TALE** in your community. With our complimentary viewing guides and other materials, we are committed to supporting your discussions and your participation. Thank you for helping us ***change the conversation.***

(original capitals, bold and italics, 2018)

The use of personal and collective pronouns encourages a sense of community action, which manifests as a metatextual extension of the testimonial invitation. With this guidance on, and perpetuation of, the invitation to bear witness, Fox assumes an

ambassadorial role that both enables self-witness and actively encourages ethical, empathic witnessing as an imperative cultural step.

Dori Laub explains that trauma “invariably plays a decisive formative role in who one comes to be, and in how one comes to live one’s life”, even when the trauma is “repressed” (70). Fox’s self-witnessing project illuminates this traumatic legacy by bearing witness to her abusers’ strategies of coercion and the lasting impact of the indoctrination she experienced in the facilitation of her abuse. In *The Tale*, Mrs. G and Bill initially exploit to their advantage Jenny’s feelings of marginalisation within her family. When Jenny’s sister breaks her arm, her parents are unable to attend Jenny’s end-of-season riding event at Mrs. G’s ranch, leaving Bill as her sole source of support during the competition; after the event Mrs. G takes a stranded Jenny to meet him for dinner at a nearby diner. It is during this meeting that Mrs. G and Bill begin to groom Jenny by flattering her writing and athletic talents before sharing the details of their affair. Jenny’s voiceover reflects upon this moment in a passage taken from the essay:

How did they know they could trust me with their secret, that I would never break their confidence? The other girls would have told on them, but I would never tell my parents or the other adults. It was like an unspoken oath, and I felt proud of it.

(38:20-38)

Jenny’s Montagnean introspection in the essay eschews the risk of secrecy, instead postulating an alliance of equals that further expresses her naïveté, which is all too clear to both Jennifer and the viewer. By bringing Jenny into their confidence the couple establish the “secret order” of victimhood (Laub, 1995: p. 67), which Laub explains is “lived as an unconscious alternate truth” long after the experience of trauma. When Jenny claims she feels invisible at home, Bill tells her: “They can’t see you the way we can” (46:03) as he offers an alternative ‘family’ “based on complete honesty and love. Hiding nothing, revealing everything, just the truth” (46:24-37). This truth is subtly levied by Mrs. G and Bill, who expedite Jenny’s ‘inclusion’ by positing their own ideals as enlightened when compared with her parents’ conventional principles (45:06-46:37). This alternate ideology persists into adulthood, evinced as Jennifer’s indifference to marriage and her promiscuity in the wake of her abuse. When Jennifer’s patient but concerned fiancé, Martin, learns of her systemic manipulation by reading the letters she exchanged with Mrs. G and Bill, he levels “That’s rape. That’s illegal” (54:16), but Jennifer’s riposte is one of acceptance and justification: “It was the seventies and people didn’t talk about it like

that" (54:24). The same rationale is offered by Iris (Gretchen Koerner), who is initially presented as another adjacent witness, the existence of whom Jennifer had effaced, in her attempt to make sense of her past. As Jennifer conducts what is essentially a documentary interview with Iris, the reason for Iris' omission becomes clear: as Iris recounts her involvement with Bill and Mrs. G, Jennifer's disclosure leads Iris to the realisation that she too was indoctrinated by the couple, transitioning from victim within the "secret order" to eventual co-conspirator, facts that she had similarly repressed (1:28:53-1:30:15). Iris provides the missing detail that allows Jennifer to assimilate the truth of her past, explaining that Mrs. G was "the cat bringing the mouse to [Bill]" (1:30:28). As the recurrent flashback of the couple's introductory vignettes is replayed once again, the gaps in Jenny's story are filled by the acceptance that Mrs. G was the catalyst in the cycle of abuse. This realisation is substantiated by the inclusion of additional details in the flashback montage, such as Mrs. G's suggestion that Jenny stable her horse at the ranch in the diner scene, Bill's account of Mrs. G's fantasies about Jenny whilst they're in bed together, and Mrs. G's involvement in the orchestration of the group encounter with Iris (1:30:46-1:31:50), all of which irrevocably reshape Jennifer's perception of her past and the viewer's understanding of the intricacies and depth of Fox's systemic abuse.

In their book *Traumatic Affect* (2013), Meera Atkinson and Michael Richardson aver: "being open to one's own trauma is necessary in order to be open to that of another, and conversely opening to the trauma of others facilitates opening to one's own" (p. 3). This assertion attests to the intersubjective exchange of testimonial witnessing as exhibited in Jennifer's encounter with Iris, who is only able to acknowledge the true nature of past events by hearing Jennifer's account and offering her own in return. Jennifer's epiphanic realisation ultimately compels her to revisit Mrs. G in search of resolution. Though the elderly Mrs. G (Frances Conroy) denies Jennifer the acknowledgment she needs, refusing to engage in the reciprocal testimonial exchange Jennifer tentatively attempts to convene (1:16:30-1:19:45), Fox, through her autofilmic testimony, empathetically recognises Mrs. G as another of Bill's victims. In an imagined documentary-style interview between Jennifer and the young Mrs. G (Debicki), Jennifer questions Mrs. G's failure to 'save' her from off-screen: "I couldn't ask for help. I was waiting for you to save me. Somehow in my mind it couldn't be anybody else. It had to be you. Why didn't you?" (1:39:36-49). As Mrs. G gazes directly into the camera lens with tears in her eyes, she simply states "no-one saved me" (1:39:50). Here, as she does elsewhere in the film, Fox hints at Mrs. G's own abusive past, offering a possible rationale for both Mrs. G's behaviour, and Jennifer's apparent forgiveness. Fox's filmic testimony withholds any kind of elaboration on the subject of Mrs. G's implied traumatic past, but the subtext of cyclical trauma, coupled with

Fox's empathetic portrayal of the elderly Mrs. G and her devotion to her ailing husband Dr. G (Grant James), suggest that Fox may have occupied the role of receiver of the real-world Mrs. G's testimony prior to her death and the film's production.¹⁷

Jennifer's apparent compassion for Iris, and for Mrs. G in spite of her actions, is further evidence of the autobiographical "tracks" of empathy in Fox's autofilmic testimony, much like those Leah Anderst identifies in literary autobiographies (2015). For Anderst, the tracks of empathy in autobiographical narratives manifest as "channels [...] across which affective responses and empathetic engagement may travel between figures within and outside of the texts" (2015: p. 273). Autobiographical narratives demonstrate the subject's empathy with "real others" as well as their empathy with the narrated or experiencing 'I' as representative of their self in the past (Anderst, 2015: p. 274). These tracks effectively relay empathy between the autobiographer – as the real person and author of the text – and those represented within the narrative, and concurrently between the reader (or viewer) and those represented within the narrative, and back to the author-subject (Anderst, 2015: pp. 273-274). In *The Tale*, the empathic tracks within the narrative evince Fox's empathy with those involved in her traumatic past and her process of self-witnessing. The exchange between Jennifer and Iris reveals Fox's empathy with Iris as someone who was also subject to Bill and Mrs. G's exploitation, positing Iris's experience as akin to her own, whilst the stylised interview between Jennifer and the young Mrs. G subtly remarks upon the perpetuity of the secret order and its lasting impact. In so doing, Fox acknowledges the often unspoken and endemic nature of sexual exploitation, demonstrating the metonymic and representative responsibility of her autofilmic testimony, which she readily and rigorously accepts.

Laub explains, "Survivors who do not tell their story become victims of a distorted memory [...], which causes an endless struggle with and of a delusion"; he goes on to avow "[t]he longer the story remains untold, the more distorted it becomes in the survivor's conception of it, so much so that the survivor doubts the reality of the actual events" (1995: p. 64). As a mode of existential "repossession", testimony "is a dialogical process of exploration and reconciliation of two worlds – the one that was brutally destroyed and the one that is" (Laub, 1995: p. 74). In the repression of the traumatic truth of her past for more than thirty years, Jennifer initially failed to recognise her childhood essay as self-witness from "within the experience" (Laub, 61), negating its healing potential. The repercussions of undisclosed traumatic experience are articulated onscreen in a stylised dialogue between

¹⁷ Fox has stated in numerous publicly available interviews that she spoke with 'Mrs. G' during her time writing the screenplay, but that Mrs G died before the film was realised.

Jenny and Jennifer, which allows Fox to underscore the disparity between misinterpreted childhood trauma and the adult reclamation of memory that informs the belated realisation of abuse. Recognising that the truth had been hidden in plain sight the whole time, Jennifer challenges her younger self: Jenny walks through the school hallway gazing directly into the camera lens, when Jennifer's voice from off screen accuses "You lied to me. You told me it was a good thing all these years" (1:41:24-28). Jenny repeats the doctrine against marriage and children – a view Jennifer has maintained into adulthood – resolute in her refusal of victimhood; but, her fear manifests when Jennifer tells her there were other victims and that she is planning to confront Bill in the present, which stops Jenny in her tracks as the school bell rings (1:43:00). Jennifer's acceptance of the testimonial nature of the essay mobilises her belated act of self-witness through a symbolic confrontation with Bill (John Heard) as the 'telling' of her traumatic past secures her "liberation" (Laub, 70). However, Bill is not afforded the same empathetic portrayal as Mrs. G within the autofilmic testimony. Surrounded by revellers and former students, Bill delivers an egotistical acceptance speech for a prestigious award; an anxious Jennifer, after meeting Bill's much younger wife, Margie (Jaqueline Fleming) (1:44:46), introduces herself to Bill, who has already begun to compliment her, going as far as touching her hair. When Bill attempts to kiss her on the cheek in recognition and greeting, Jennifer recoils, before mounting a verbal and increasingly public exposition of Bill's past conduct. Bill initially pleads ignorance, but is ultimately exposed as an unremorseful, serial predator, blaming Jennifer for her lack of trust, as other female guests appear to identify with Jennifer's account. As Bill is ushered from the room, Jennifer vaguely addresses the nearby witnesses: "What? Nobody else was coached by Bill?" (1:47:46) before retreating to the restroom to vomit as she did after every physical encounter with Bill as a child. Though she did not confront Bill as depicted in the film, Fox cites his reluctance to discuss and take responsibility for the past as the reason for the scene's inclusion (Gray, 2018); however, this creative intervention also affords Jennifer the cathartic closure she needs, and Fox a definitive opportunity to articulate the specificity of her personal trauma. Like Kim's mythical catharsis in *Arirang*, as discussed in Chapter One, Fox makes use of fiction to reconcile her traumatic past with her present as a form of narrative self-liberation. Ultimately, the production and commercial release of *The Tale* constitute Fox's self-witnessing testimony, with the viewer as ethical and empathic witness to both the product and the process. The final scene shows Jennifer and Jenny seated side-by-side on the restroom floor, united as the testimonial 'I', in a symbolic representation of the reconciliation of past with present, experiencing 'I' with narrating 'I', memory with experience, as Fox's conclusive testimonial gesture of repossession and empathy with herself.

The Tale's testimonial status influenced the critical and commercial reception of the film, as Fox strategically managed both the release and distribution of the film in line with her own testimonial agenda (mentioned earlier). When the film premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2018, the industry was besieged by the coalescing sociopolitical #TimesUp and #MeToo movements in response to widespread allegations of historical sexual assault and misogyny. In this context, Fox wanted to "break the picture" of what an abused woman looks like (Fox in Gray), to challenge public perceptions of belated disclosure and to address pervasive opinions around the perpetrators of historical sexual abuse. Fox's representative awareness is further evinced in the deliberate "mediatization" (O'Loughlin, 2013) of *The Tale*. Ben O' Loughlin explains:

Mediatization refers to the manner in which a social event, process or practice becomes considered by those participating in it as a media phenomenon, and any media organisations involved are aware of themselves as integral to that phenomenon.

(2013: p. 193)

Fox's public profile, coupled with the film's personal and testimonial capital, inevitably drew significant media interest, but this interest was mobilised as activism, using the film's press to draw attention to – and raise awareness of – the effects of childhood sexual trauma and the rationale for belated outcry in cases of historical sexual abuse. Jordan Hoffman's five-star review in *The Guardian* dubbed *The Tale* "the mother of all #MeToo movies", describing it as "an innovative, honest and important film" that made both him and his contemporaries "extremely uncomfortable" during the Sundance screening he attended (n.p.). Hoffman urges readers to see *The Tale*, essentially perpetuating Fox's invitation to bear "witness to the process of witnessing itself" (Laub, 1995: p. 62).

Moreover, by revealing her own experience of childhood trauma as filmic testimony within the public domain, Fox championed therapeutic engagement, creating an online presence for the film that included numerous resources for those who might have been affected by the issues raised in *The Tale*. The film's website includes an index of links to support charities and organizations at the bottom of each page, all of which Fox has engaged with in the composition and dissemination of the film. The website remains active to this day, providing a paratextual platform beyond the viewing experience through which Fox is able to propagate the testimonial witnessing paradigm, offering an interactive outpost for testimony that provides both education and empathy for those who need either, or both.

Graphic Content: Representing Repression

The animated *Persepolis* constitutes a powerful and ambassadorial autofilmic testimony that bears witness to a larger traumatic cultural issue, figuratively “unveiling” (Naghbi and O’Malley, 2005: p. 224) the experience of the traumatised collective in Iran through Satrapi’s own self-witnessing project. Where Fox consciously constructed the metatextual framing of *The Tale* to further propagate her testimonial invitation to witnessing, Satrapi’s testimonial advocacy is primarily perpetuated pedagogically, with her multimedial autobiographical portraiture afforded a surfeit of scholarly attention. The published comic is noteworthy for its reported “universality” (Naghbi and O’Malley, 2005: p. 226), marketed under numerous genre labels including “autobiography; children’s or young adult’s literature; graphic novel; middle east history; women’s studies” (Naghbi and O’Malley, 2002: p. 223) and heralded as a “timely and timeless story” (*Publishers Weekly*, 2003). Often critically situated alongside the paradigmatic Pulitzer-Prize-winning comic memoir *Maus* (1980) by Art Spiegelman, the comic *Persepolis* is lauded as a canonical text within the burgeoning fields of comic studies and life writing, with the text’s critical intersections – autobiography and history, sequential art and subjectivity, childhood and war – inviting a broad spectrum of intellectual inquiry from feminist and post-colonial scholars alike. As a performative reenactment of the same testimonial labour, the animated *Persepolis* shares much of the comic’s notoriety, but furthermore, the cinematic medium renews and reinvigorates academic interest in Satrapi’s testimony, whilst it affords her invitation an extended, global platform.

Although critically acclaimed as “a movie with an urgent new story to tell and an urgent new way of telling it” (Bradshaw, 2008), Satrapi’s autofilmic testimonial invitation was not universally accepted, as the film provides a less-than-favourable perspective on a contentious period of Iranian history. Prior to the film’s official screening at Cannes it was the subject of much controversy, with Satrapi the recipient of heavy criticism from cinema advocates in her native Iran, who claimed that the film provides “an unreal picture of the outcomes and achievements of the Islamic Revolution” (Rezadad in Jaafar, 2007). At the time, Satrapi refused to, in her own words, “nourish [the] dispute” (in Jaafar, 2007) by engaging with the Iranian press, stating only “I accept criticism” and “I believe in freedom of expression and speech” (ibid). In a recent interview, after the resurgence in the comic *Persepolis*’ popularity due to its inclusion in actress and feminist Emma Watson’s ‘Our Shared Shelf’ book club, Satrapi attests to the authenticity of her testimony, stating “I am a person who was born in a certain place, in a certain time, and I can be unsure about everything, but I am not unsure of what I have lived. I know it”. She goes on to explain that it is difficult to “identify with” a nation, but that a single person’s story is much easier to

relate to (in Watson, 2016). Much as Fox's testimonial endeavour reveals the nuances of childhood sexual abuse, Satrapi's autofilmic testimony demystifies cultural trauma, inviting the viewer to bear witness through a medium that offers a particularly pertinent form of empathic engagement. For Satrapi, "the cinema is a machine of empathy" as "there is no media in the world that can create as much empathy as cinema" (in Watson, 2016). The animated *Persepolis*' executive producer, Kathleen Kennedy, further claims that through the film Satrapi "[opens] up a channel of communication" (in Jaafar, 2007), indicative of the intersubjective and empathic witnessing structure that the autofilmic testimony invokes. This channel persists beyond the film, in tandem with the comic, bearing witness to Satrapi's personal trauma and the plight of the Iranian people, humanising the ordeal of the collective as graphically mediated experience. What becomes apparent then, is that Satrapi's testimonial strategy is predicated upon "ambassadorial strategic empathy" (Keen, 2006: p. 2015), founded upon the notion of bearing witness to and for the repressed in a manner that evades state censorship and makes otherwise silenced voices heard.

Satrapi's ambassadorial invitation is further evinced by her decision to both write and release the comic and the film in French in the first instance, using the native language of her emancipatory home, which is also the lingua franca of her liberation – both before and after the revolution.¹⁸ Originally published in four volumes, the comic was translated into English as one volume and retitled *The Complete Persepolis* in 2003.¹⁹ The volume encompasses Satrapi's childhood in Iran – which straddles the Islamic Revolution and the resultant Iraq-Iran war – along with a period of exile spent in Vienna as a teenager, her return to Iran, and her eventual permanent departure. A critical tension between East and West underpins Satrapi's testimonial voice, with the interrogation of culture, politics, religion and identity all fundamental to the autobiographical discourse. In an introductory note that precedes the graphic narrative, Satrapi explains the political history of Iran, citing its "domination" by foreign "invaders" and the power struggles that ensued for control of its natural resources (2008: n.p). Satrapi concludes this overview with a statement of intent:

Since [the Islamic revolution], this old and great civilization [Iran] has been discussed mostly in connection with fundamentalism, fanaticism, and terrorism. As an Iranian who has lived more than half my life in Iran, I know that this image is far from the truth. This is why writing *Persepolis* was so important to me. I believe that an entire nation should not be

¹⁸ Satrapi was educated in a francophone school run by nuns before Islamic rule imposed segregation.

¹⁹ I cite from the 2008 Vintage publication of *Persepolis* throughout.

judged by the wrongdoings of a few extremists. I also don't want those Iranians who lost their lives in prisons defending freedom, who died in war against Iraq, who suffered under various regimes, or who were forced to leave their families and flee their homeland to be forgotten.

One can forgive but one should never forget.

(n.p.)

The paratextual note refutes pervasive Western ideologies, and Satrapi articulates her testimonial agenda by pledging to bear witness, even before she issues the autobiographical invitation in the first graphic frame (p. 3). As Hilary Chute observes: "*Persepolis* is about the ethical verbal and visual practice of 'not forgetting'" through "the political confluence of the everyday and the historical" (2008: p. 94), a practice that is transposed into the production of the animated film. For Chute, the comic demonstrates Satrapi's command of visual media in an "exploration of extremity" (Chute, 2008: p. 92) that is able to both 'show' and 'tell' experience from a uniquely stylised perspective. Therefore, Satrapi's comic autobiography is the precedent model for "visual and verbal witnessing" (Chute, 2008: p. 94) from which the animated *Persepolis* (2007) is produced, and consequently, the film retains the testimonial agenda of not forgetting inherent in the comic.

The popular appeal of the source comic, along with the film's collaborative production, inevitably invites scrutiny of the animated *Persepolis* as an adaptation, a critical perspective that does inform the forthcoming analysis as a presage to the discussion of auteurbiographical adaptations in Section Two. The transposition of the narrative from print comic to animated film highlights the shift in the mode of reading that the filmic narrative invites, primarily in terms of the animation's elision of the gutters and captions that characterise comic forms. However, Satrapi's approach to remediation has significant implications for her electively representative role within the broader context of her testimonial endeavour, as will become clear. As the animated *Persepolis* is posited in this chapter as the testimonial progeny of an individual author-subject, the effects of the adaptive process are foregrounded as Satrapi's deliberate emphasis of the collective impact of cultural trauma as related to her autofilmic testimony's ambassadorial testimonial agenda.²⁰ Nevertheless, the retention of Satrapi's original comic's drawings, retraced at length in frame-by-frame animation in the film, preserves her distinctive graphic perspective, and the unique representational idiom of her autobiographical 'I',

²⁰The adaptation of autobiographical acts is addressed in more detail in Section Two.

placing her 'in' the film. Consequently, Satrapi expands upon her original performative testimony through her 'hands-on' supervision of the adaptive animation process, by citing herself within the filmic discourse to legitimate the remediated testimonial endeavour. Accordingly, the following analysis holds the autobiographical invitation of the autofilmic testimonial I/eye and the cognisant instantiation of the testimonial witnessing structure as its central focus.

Much like Jennifer Fox in the production of *The Tale*, Satrapi's autobiographical authority is asserted through her roles as both co-writer and co-director of the animated film.²¹ Satrapi also retains the autobiographical inscription of the 'real name', which "signals to the reader an intended fidelity [...] to a world of biographical reference beyond the text" (Eakin, 1992: p. 28), connecting the autobiographical 'I' of both the book and the film as referents for the real-world self-witness, Satrapi. Like *The Tale*, the animated *Persepolis* also adopts the narrative viewpoint of both the experiencing/narrated 'I' of the child, and the narrating 'I' of the adult in tandem to construct the testimonial 'I' of the autofilmic testimony. Unlike *The Tale*, however, Satrapi installs the narrating 'I' as a "frame narrator" (Nixon, 2010: p. 94), who provides a temporally progressive and retrospective witnessing structure to which the remembered experience of autofilmic testimony is tethered, and which mimics the discursive narrative strategy of the caption box in the comic source. Whereas the memory work of Fox's autofilmic testimony necessitates a dialogic relationship between past and present, experiencing 'I' and narrating 'I', in order to install a composite iteration of the testimonial 'I' and a true account of Fox's experience for the viewer as witness, Satrapi's testimonial agenda of not forgetting requires the assertion of separate – yet co-operative – incarnations of the experiencing 'I' and narrating 'I' in the assertion of a bilateral testimonial 'I' to build an accurate diachronic account. In the animated *Persepolis*, both the experiencing child 'I' and the narrating adult 'I' articulate Satrapi's dynamic and developing testimonial 'I'. The narrating 'I' as a frame narrator offers commentary through voiceover, providing connective context for the episodes involving the experiencing 'I' and the ways in which they constitute self-witnessing testimony within the invitational witnessing structure of autofilmic testimony, directly addressing the viewer as witness.

Where Fox issues the testimonial invitation immediately through a disembodied, vocal assertion of testimonial truth without a visual anchor, Satrapi initially withholds the testimonial invitation, choosing instead to begin her autofilmic testimony with establishing shots of an airport with no dialogue. Though Marjane is identified as the empathic target

²¹ Satrapi credits Vincent Paronnaud as co-writer and co-director.

through subjective framing and reverse-shot subjective perspective as she inspects the departures board (2:02), the narrating 'I's first words are not uttered until over three minutes into the film. The withholding of Marjane's narrative voice encourages the viewer to read the images instead, to piece together Marjane's "emplacement" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 42), in terms of the cultural and contextual setting in which her narrative takes place, and the ways in which "subject position" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 42) is configured within these discourses.²² The narrative present is coded by a muted colour palette, with the narrating 'I', the adult Marjane (voiced by Chiara Mastroianni), pictured in a red coat, and the narrated past is depicted in stark black and white, as the ten-year-old Marji (Amethyste Frezignac), the experiencing/narrated 'I', skips through the frame in which Marjane waits for her flight (2:52). Marjane's voiceover describes the "uneventful, peaceful existence" (3:13) of her younger self, as the precocious child confidently addresses the adults in the flashback vignette, asserting her ability to assist with the luggage; but in the present Marjane is sombre, stoically donning her veil under the scrutiny of a red-haired woman in a restroom before smoking a solitary cigarette in the airport lounge. In these opening scenes, the viewer is introduced to the identity politics at play within the testimonial narrative, and the bilateral iteration of the testimonial 'I' that issues the autobiographical invitation. The airport setting, and Marjane's nonverbal interactions with those around her, convey both her isolation and her otherness, as determined by her lack of communication and the visual markers of her cultural beliefs and ethnicity in contrast with those around her. Marjane is presented as geographically and temporally distant from her home and her childhood self, to establish the diegetic present of the narrating 'I' and frame narrator of the autofilmic testimony. The narrative's retrospective and subjective scope is asserted through the statement "I remember" (3:11), heard as Marjane's voiceover, which issues the autobiographical invitation to bear witness to the testimonial narrative that follows.

Satrapī's autofilmic testimony is comprised of three key sections: her childhood in Iran before, during and after the revolution; her adolescence as the new Islamic regime takes power and she is exiled to Europe; and early adulthood that sees her short-lived return to Iran before she leaves again. One of the major themes in the first act of Satrapī's autofilmic testimony is the establishment and development of the subjective emplacement, as mentioned above, with particular reference to Marjane's family history, ideology and politics. Throughout the animated *Persepolis*, Satrapī mobilises the testimonies of others as both context and evidence of the "cultural disorientation" (Sztompka, 2000: p. 453) that informs her "ideological 'I'", which refers to the social, institutional and historical

²² A theoretical overview of positionality is given in Chapter One.

discourses within which a subject's sense of self is developed (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 76). In addition, the social framing (Schmitt, 2017) simultaneously propagates the relational fabric of testimony, often found in post-conflict documentary projects. As a minor, Marji's ideology is shaped by the testimonies of "significant others" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 86), who, as explained in Chapter One, play a substantial role in the subject's self-formation. Marji's propensity for empathic witnessing is learned from her family, all of whom are active in their resolute resistance to the Shah's regime and the changing political climate, and steadfast in their support of like-minded peers. In order to convey to the viewer the historical and ideological context of Satrapi's testimony in the film, as described in the aforementioned paratextual note in the comic, Marji's father (Sean Penn) explains to his wilful daughter the political facts of the Shah's ascendancy in contrast with the preferred, and heretofore accepted, cultural history offered to her by her teachers – that the Shah was appointed by God (05:35-07:36). These contradictory narratives represent the "coexisting" and "competing ideological notions" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 77) that jockey for position in the development of Marji's ideological 'I', and the relational framework and testimonial agenda of Satrapi's autofilmic testimony. In both the comic and the film, Marji's father offers this history with the authority of a living witness, delivered in the oral tradition with the accompanying images and dialogue adopting a somewhat pantomime tone on screen. Though condensed from the original comic, the cinematic narrative retains Marji's playful, childlike perspective, with the characters in her imagined reenactment of her father's story depicted on a curtained stage, with puppet-like, spasmodic movements at odds with the film's standard, fluid animation (05:49-07:21). This imagined reenactment reflects Marji's simplistic understanding of her history at this point in her childhood. Moreover, the dream sequence that follows her father's story is indicative of young Marji's crude conceptions of war and communism, with her inability to conceive of the storied atrocities brought into relief by the stark, black and faceless images of soldiers opposing a similarly anonymous but reticent lay public (07:55-08:50). Marji's juvenile grasp of the concepts explained to her is further emphasised by her mispronunciation of communist as "comuniss" as she falls asleep (07:45). Marji's youthful naiveté progressively dissolves as the narrative unfolds, as a consequence of bearing witness to the first-hand experience of numerous others through further oral testimonies. When family friend, Siamak, visits after a period of incarceration, he regales Marji and her family with a frank account of his own experience of torture under the Shah regime (10:34-11:33). A wide-eyed Marji is captivated as the man speaks, further enthralled by Siamak's daughter's pronouncement of her father as a hero, which both children accept unquestioningly in light of his pragmatic testimony. But, Marji's misunderstanding of the circumstances of Siamak's imprisonment manifests as a

reenactment of torture against a friend, Ramin, whose father is a Shah soldier, for which she is severely reprimanded by her mother (11:55-12:35). Marji's haste to punish Ramin is indicative of the empathy she feels for Siamak as witness to his testimony, which is in turn witnessed by the viewer as vital historical insight. Seeking clarification, Marji converses with God, who tells her it is her duty to forgive those who commit murder in the Shah's name and explains that the boy she tried to punish is not accountable for his father's actions (13:00-18). But, when Marji attempts to offer her forgiveness, Ramin rejects her, denouncing communists in vocal support of his father's beliefs, which only confounds Marji further (13:20-35). However, when Marji's uncle, Anoosh (Iggy Pop) also visits the Satrapi household upon his release from prison, he forges a close relationship with Marji through his tales of ancestral resistance to the Shah regime and his own exile in the Soviet Union. Unlike the satire of the earlier reenactment that supplemented her father's story, Anoosh's testimony is authorised by a reenactment largely indistinguishable stylistically from the main narrative, which – when compared with the imagined pantomime and dream sequence mentioned earlier – denotes Marji's improved understanding, the significance of the testimony within Satrapi's autofilmic testimony, and its basis in lived reality. Anoosh explains: "The reason I'm telling you all this is because it's important that you know the history of our family, that it should never be forgotten. Even if you don't understand everything, and even if it's painful for you", to which Marji responds "Don't worry Uncle Anoosh, I promise I'll never forget" (17:36-17:48). The confluence of familial testimonies endows Marji – and the viewer – with a greater sense of her political heritage and cultural identity, and facilitates Marji's ideological awakening, which shapes both the ideological 'I' and the testimonial agenda of her narrated autobiographical account. In relaying these testimonies through her own autofilmic testimony, Satrapi bears witness to witnessing through the lens of her own childhood experience, fortified by the testimonies of others, which serves to illuminate the origins of her unique ideological perspective and also her learned capacity for empathic witnessing and testimonial discourse.

Satrapi's testimonial perspective differs from Jennifer Fox's in that the focal trauma at the centre of her testimony is cultural as well as personal, experienced as a member of a collective or community for which a progressive and irreversible social change occurs. Jeffrey C. Alexander asserts that cultural trauma leaves "indelible marks upon [the collective's] group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (Alexander, 2004: p. 1). For Kai Erikson, "collective trauma" constitutes:

A blow to the basic tissues of social life that damages the bonds attaching people together and impairs the prevailing sense of communality. The

collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of those who suffer from it, [...] a gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared.

(1976: p. 154)

Satrapī's animated *Persepolis* describes this gradual realisation as a result of both the Islamic Revolution and the war that ensues from both Marjī's, and subsequently Marjane's position within the Iranian community, describing the shifting attitudes both as they occur within herself and in those around her over time. As a demonstrative act of testimonial witnessing, the narrating 'I' of the voiceover accompanies the monochrome images of conflict in the wake of the revolution, with a soundtrack of explosions to match the glowing light on the dark horizon and a melancholic instrumental ancillary over shadowy executions and civilians hiding in their homes:

One year after the revolution, Iraq attacked Iran. *Our* country was weak and Saddam took the opportunity to strike. The revolution and massive purges from the army had left *us* extremely vulnerable. Under the pretence of fighting the foreign enemy, the Iranian government exterminated the domestic enemy. In other words, the former opponents of the Shah. Arrests and executions became common practice. *Everyone* was afraid. This reign of fear allowed the new government to introduce laws that were even more repressive. In just two years' time *our* daily lives had changed drastically, and so had *we*.

(my italics, 21:31-22:06)

Marjane's use of collective pronouns (italicised above) emphasises the progressive impact of the conflict on the collective, further asserting the metonymy of self-witness in Satrapī's autofilmic testimony as a denunciation of the impact of cultural trauma on the collective, and the representative status of self-witness. Consequently, Satrapī's testimonial invitation encompasses both "ambassadorial" and "bounded strategic empathy" (Keen, 2006: p. 215) throughout, as her autofilmic testimony articulates her own personal experience as well as advocating the shared experience of the traumatised collective. As Stacey Weber-Fève attests: "the literal or metaphorical or even metonymical focus on characters and their states of being and seeing transgresses the conventional boundaries of the narrative to heighten our emotional involvement with our emotional investment in the text" (2011: p. 327). Satrapī shows, from her insider perspective, that the historical and irrevocable impact of cultural trauma for her and her compatriots cannot and must not be forgotten.

The lasting legacy of the Islamic Revolution is codified on screen through Satrapi's foregrounding of the veil. The veil has come to signify "Eastern otherness from the Western perspective" (Klapcsik, 2016: p. 79) and Satrapi uses it throughout *Persepolis* as a dominant symbol of "cultural disorientation" – a symptom of cultural trauma that emerges "due to radically changed technological, economic, or political conditions" (Sztompka, 2000: p. 453) – with the first chapter of the comic named after the iconic object. The imposition of the veil by the new Islamic government marks a significant turning point in both Satrapi's childhood and in the cohesion of the Iranian community at the onset of the Islamic revolution, and is the crucial point at which Marji's graphic narrative begins. In the comic, Marji's conflicted feelings about the veil are succinctly conveyed in one frame in particular, whereby the child is represented as split vertically down the middle, one half veiled and the other half not (p. 6). This image articulates the dichotomy of modernity versus religion, or the East/West cultural opposition, which summarises what Marji perceives as the inherent discord at the heart of Iran's collective trauma, as two seemingly irreconcilable cultural characteristics. In the film, the same underlying dissonance is revealed piecemeal, with the veil's significance foreshadowed in the opening scenes where the narrating 'I', the adult Marjane, reinstates her veil at the airport. The first scene in which the veil is worn collectively comes over twenty minutes into the film, only after Satrapi's testimonial perspective has been firmly asserted: eighteen young women – some only partially visible – are shown beating their breasts to honour the fallen martyrs of the ongoing Iraq/Iran war (22: 06). Initially, it is difficult to identify Marji as each of the figures appears very similar, part of a sea of white, vacant faces set against an undefined black background in which the individuals' veils seem to merge together, signifying the collective (see Figure 2.3). But, Marji's central position in the frame proclaims her status as the empathic target of the autofilmic discourse, confirmed by an extreme close up of her face (21:54). Marji is further distinguished from her peers as the students return to the school building, when she breaks ranks to openly mock the practice of self-flagellation, rolling on the floor with her Nike high-tops visible, her sarcasm drawing the ire of her teacher (22:15-24). In the classroom, the teacher dictates the virtues of the veil to her sceptical students: "The veil is synonymous with freedom. A woman who's virtuous is a woman who hides herself from the eyes of men. Those who reveal themselves are indulging in sin and will burn in hell" (22:28-41). As the teacher's voice fades, it is replaced by Marji's, as she and her classmates covertly compare their pop music tastes before they are interrupted by an air-raid siren and forced to file out of the lesson (22:50). This episode demonstrates the ways in which Marji simultaneously obeys and rejects the mandate of the new religious order – as though split – by wearing

the veil and observing the ritual, but without any real belief or conviction, and whilst flouting the ban on modernity – or ‘Western decadence’.



Figure 2.3: *Marji at the centre of her classmates and the merging of their veils.*

Marji's 'splitness' is representative of the underlying tension within the community. The adolescent preoccupations of 'coming of age', such as popular music and fashion, along with the indulgent recreations of a formerly avant-garde community, are demonised under Iran's Islamic rule, which imposes a belief system largely at odds with that of the liberal, educated Satrapi family and their contemporaries. As formerly acceptable activities under the Shah, parties and alcohol consumption continue behind closed doors, primarily in domestic settings where the Satrapi women routinely discard their veils; in the voiceover, Marjane claims "Attending these parties was not without danger, but it was the only semblance of freedom we had left" (35:49). Fundamentally, both Marji and her family negotiate cultural disorientation by refusing to conform, or rather by electing to humour the restrictions of the Islamic regime, but only in a public setting.

The covert enjoyment of prohibited 'Western' practices within the community further evinces the "disorganization, displacement, [and] incoherence" of cultural disorientation (Sztompka, 2000: p. 453), which occurs due to the conflicting ideologies of the collective and the new government's patriarchal rules. As Satrapi shows, despite many Iranian women's public commitment to conformity during the cultural shift, they are continually policed by vehement supporters of the Islamic regime in everyday life. As Marji and her mother leave the supermarket, for example, a bearded man yells to Marji's mother "fix your scarf" (24:07), a phrase that recurs throughout the autofilmic testimony as a vocalised imperative of the Islamic regime's strict expectation of female modesty. When Marji's mother does not immediately respond, the man presses "you heard me woman!", at which point Marji's mother gently resists the man's intervention with the reply "Sir, why don't you try being more polite and say ma'am next time? I deserve a little more respect"

(24:13). The man is incensed, yelling menacing and misogynistic insults and physically intimidating her. Marji's mother, accustomed to the liberty and freedom of speech she enjoyed prior to the Islamic Revolution, is visibly angry and upset, which causes her to lash out verbally during their drive home, breaking with her commitment to public conformity. Marji is witness to this altercation, which marks the beginning of the end of her childhood in Iran, whilst firmly installing the empathic track between Satrapi and her mother and further propagating the empathic invitation to testimonial witnessing for the viewer.

As the narrative progresses, Satrapi depicts the increasing tension of cultural disorientation, as the viewer is invited to witness the subversive, yet seemingly minor infringements under the repressive regime. For example, Marji nonchalantly peruses the black market with money willingly given by her mother to purchase a contraband cassette; she embarks upon her shopping trip alone, wearing a punk jacket, high-tops, and a Michael Jackson badge, as well as the requisite veil. Marji's attire attracts the attention of the female Guardians of the Revolution, who begin by reprimanding her for her clothing, then slighting the improper arrangement of her veil, yelling "Lower your scarf, you slut!" whilst physically pulling it down over her eyebrows (27:35). On this occasion, Marji avoids detainment with a series of lies about her home life, bursting into tears that eventually temper the Guardians' outrage and secure her release. However, Marji's adolescent disregard for the regime becomes righteous indignation after her uncle is hospitalised, and her friend is killed in a missile attack, events that are represented as increasingly "ordinary" (Chute, 2008: p. 105) within the worsening context of cultural trauma. Marji's horror is replaced by anger when her teacher claims that there are no longer any political prisoners in Iran under the Islamic regime, which prompts Marji's corrective interjection:

Excuse me. My uncle was imprisoned under the Shah, but it was the new regime that had him executed. You say there is [sic] no political prisoners, but from 3,000 under the Shah we went to 300, 000. How dare you tell such big lies!

(38:35-46)

Marji's outburst wins her a standing ovation from her classmates, but there are repercussions for her actions. The incident leads her mother to reflect upon Marji's secular upbringing, concluding that she must send Marji away to save her from the potentially traumatic consequences of her inherited ideological convictions, which manifest as her uncontained resistance to the new order. Marji's parents' political principles, by which they stand, and of which they have deliberately apprised their daughter, pose a significant risk

to Marji's safety under the strict Islamic regime; their definitive act of both love and defiance is to send Marji to Austria at the tender age of fourteen, to enable her escape from the watchful eye of state repression and allow her to embrace her innate independence. Consequently, Marji's nomadism becomes literal, as she is forced into exile in Europe. The montage that shows Marji making her way through the airport fades to black as she witnesses her father carrying her mother – who has fainted – away from the departure gate. After the cut, the frame narrator Marjane is revealed in colour – still waiting in the airport – removing her veil in a symbolic act of remembrance and agency, indicative of the narrating 'I's empathy with her remembered self. Leaving her parents in Iran, Marji arrives in Austria without her veil, seemingly liberated, but rendered both culturally and physically displaced as the ultimate consequence of cultural disorientation.

Marji's exile is a pivotal point in Satrapi's autofilmic testimony as the second of the film's three sections, whereby the story of a childhood transitions to the story of a return.²³ Upon arrival in Austria, Marji becomes Marjane in the film, the child's voice replaced by that of the narrating 'I' (Chiara Mastroianni) in a progressive, linear narrative that brings the narrating 'I' and the experiencing 'I' ever closer within the filmic discourse, towards the ultimate reconciliatory unification of the testimonial 'I'. Marjane's testimonial invitation is essentially reissued through the literal shift in both voice and narrative perspective. Furthermore, Marji's physical departure from Iran denotes the abrupt dislocation from her collective identity as defined by the shared experience of cultural trauma, which prompts a dynamic period of personal development and comparatively introspective self-witnessing. Unlike her dialogic explication of collective trauma, which is couched in the relational and contextual testimonies of significant others, Satrapi's reflections upon displacement in the second act of the animated *Persepolis* are largely monologic, unsupported by corroborating witnesses, and distinctly self-reflexive. Accordingly, Marjane's time in Austria is characterised by the state of "in-betweenness" (Brun, 2015: p. 21), which manifests as her "[struggle] to establish the right to a place" (Brun, 2015: p. 21) as she attempts to assimilate to her newfound emancipation.

The inbetweenness of the second act is both literal and metaphorical, as the juncture of the testimonial narrative that takes place between Marji's erstwhile traumatic past and the reconciled future of the frame narrator Marjane (see Laub, 1995: p. 74). However, Satrapi condenses Marjane's four years in Austria in the film in comparison with the comic source, to preserve the metonymic status of her autofilmic testimony. The comic contains nine chapters dedicated to what the comic Marjane calls her "Viennese misadventures" (p.

²³ These are the original subtitles for *Persepolis 1* and *2*.

259); this description both reveals and trivialises the trauma of displacement indicative of Satrapi's testimonial priorities. In the comic, Satrapi explores the fragile relationships she develops as she navigates "the perilous territory of not belonging" (Said, 2000: p. 177) through several relocations, and the challenges imposed due to feelings of marginalisation and isolation during exile. However, the film hastens this personal narrative arc, eliding many peripheral relationships that emerge as a result of Marjane's perpetual upheaval. Instead, the frame narrator light-heartedly describes Marjane's multiple moves as her "apartment hopping days" (46:52), with a satirical montage accompanied by a curtailed description of each abode used to shift the narrative forward in time, simultaneously redacting the details of Satrapi's fringe relationships with those outside of the "secret order" of collective trauma (Laub, 1995: p. 67). This 'fast-forward' narrative strategy is more than excision for adaptive economy; rather, Satrapi deliberately forfeits the right to autobiographical self-reflection in favour of the representation of collective experience, privileging her role as metonymic witness within and through the autofilmic testimony.

Satrapi remains faithful to the collective testimonial agenda by offsetting Marjane's experiences of displacement against the continuing collective trauma of home. As an example, Marjane's solo visit to the well-stocked supermarket inspires awe and excitement (43:30), as the abundance of the Austrian store is posited in contrast with the sparseness of the Iranian supermarket in which her mother attempts to reprimand squabbling shoppers earlier in the film (23:49). Marjane's modest pleasure foregrounds her transition from restriction and dearth under the repressive regime, which the viewer is prompted to remember, and the disparate freedom her exile grants. Moreover, Marjane's inability to settle and forge lasting relationships in Austria emphasises the complex interconnections between place, community and identity. Marjane is forced into a perpetual state of "homelessness and placelessness" (Zetter and Boano, 2009: p. 207) after her mother's "so-called best friend", with whom it was arranged for Marjane to stay whilst in Vienna, offloads her to a boarding house that she tells Marjane will be "just the place" for her (41:10-41:23). Bereft of a collective identity so anchored in her sense of home and community, Marjane befriends a group of people from school whom she refers to as "outsiders" (43:05), in an attempt to forge a sense of belonging. But, as Marjane immerses herself in Vienna's alternative scene, she fails to connect with her new associates and the nihilistic, anti-establishment views they promote, most evident in an outburst levelled at a particularly anarchic acquaintance: "Life's not a game, it's not pointless. There are people giving their lives for freedom, okay? Do you think my uncle gave his life just for fun? Pretentious prick!" (48:19-28). Marjane's fury is caused by the collective sensibility of cultural trauma, the misunderstanding of which she feels keenly

and is compelled to counteract. In the voiceover, the frame narrator articulates the way her collective sensibility exacerbates the cultural disorientation that renders Marjane “maladjusted or ill-suited to [her] new environment” (Sztompka, 2000: p. 454):

My despair was immense. Here I was living a sheltered, frivolous existence while my family and friends were steeped in the nightmare of war. The more I tried to rid myself of the guilt with distractions, the worse I felt. I wanted nothing more than to live the life of a normal teenager.

(48:31-52)

The narrating ‘I’ makes clear that the turmoil of displacement is inextricably linked to the anguish caused by Marjane’s separation from the traumatised collective, the combination of which precludes any semblance of normalcy. Hence, as Satrapi shows, the legacy of cultural trauma dictates that the parameters of ‘normal’ life are irrevocably altered, and even geographical displacement cannot depose the collective sensibility of cultural trauma, or supersede its lasting effect.

The third and final section of Satrapi’s autofilmic testimony issues a distinctive, bilateral invitation to witnessing founded on Marjane’s subjective perspective as she returns from exile. This perspective is characterised by Marjane’s attempt to reconcile her dual subject position: as a member of the traumatised collective to which she returns, and as an outsider who comes to feel guilt over her short-lived liberation. Marjane attempts to readjust and “reconcile” the traumatic past with the traumatised present (see Laub, 1995) through the narrative, a process she negotiates as a witness to – and for – the collective. Marjane’s subjective perspective is shared by the viewer, with both unaware of the regime’s progression during her time in exile. As a veiled Marjane arrives at Teheran airport, she is questioned over “forbidden items”, including “alcohol, playing cards, music, films, cosmetics, pornography” and “pork products” (1:00:22-29), the extensive list of contraband items providing insight into the extent of the regime’s post-war control. The bearded official concludes his interrogation with the imperative “fix your headscarf, sister” (1:00:30), immediately reinstating the patriarchal authority of the Islamic regime and sanctioning Marjane’s symbolic repatriation into the collective. As Marjane readjusts to the familiar routine of her childhood home life, the narrating ‘I’ of the voiceover reflects “nothing had changed, but deep down I knew nothing would ever be the same again” (1:01:19). To confirm Marjane’s misgivings, Marjane’s father solemnly apprises his daughter – and the viewer – of the war’s impact upon the community in her absence in a protracted oration that echoes his earlier corrective history:

Sure, the war is over, it's true. But it's almost worse now in a way. People don't even know why we were at war in the first place. The West sold weapons to both sides. Unfortunately, we were stupid enough to go along with their cynical game. Eight years of war, for nothing. One million dead, for nothing. The last days of the war were atrocious. A month before the armistice, Iraq started bombing Iran every day, as if they wanted to wipe it off the map. Right before the cease-fire the regime became alarmed because an opposition army had entered Iran through the Iraqi border. The government feared that the thousands of political prisoners would become a serious threat. So they came up with a solution that would solve their problem once and for all. The government gave the prisoners a choice. They could renounce their revolutionary ideals and pledge allegiance to the regime, in which case they'd serve their full prison sentence, or, they would be executed. The majority of prisoners chose the second option.

(1:01:38-1:03:01)

Stripped of the pantomime “child’s-eye rendition of trauma” (Chute, 2008: p. 98) that characterised his previous story, the images that accompany Marjane’s father’s testimony are desolate, depicting the numerous anonymous casualties from opposing sides pouring into a central fracture in the earth, and the many executed prisoners, blindfolded, toppling to the ground in turn, like limp bowling pins (1:01:38-1:03:01). Here, Satrapi reinstates the relational dynamic of testimonial witnessing *within* the narrative to emphasise her role as a collective witness *through* the narrative. As Marjane bears witness to the magnitude of the traumatic experience of the collective, she shares her role as receiving witness with the viewer to ensure that the pain and loss experienced by the collective in her absence is voiced. To re-establish this testimonial trajectory, Satrapi constructs a dynamic empathic track (Anderst, 2015) that demonstrates her own empathy with the real others of the collective through Marjane’s role as a willing witness, a role – and track – that the viewer is invited to share. Marjane’s subjective perspective ensures that the representation of the collective’s ongoing suffering takes precedence within her metonymic testimonial agenda of not forgetting, which simultaneously expresses her humility at the anguish she was spared.

Satrapi’s autofilmic testimonial triptych concludes with a series of incidents that chart Marjane’s attempt to assert her agency and secure her permanent emancipation. Firstly, Marjane flouts the rules of the regime by wearing heavy make-up in public, drawing the

attention of the Guardians of the Revolution. She resorts to lying, as she did as a child, deciding to “put on ‘the poor defenceless woman’ act” (1:13:34) rather than face the repercussions of her defiant actions; but, on this occasion her lies have consequences for an innocent bystander who is hauled away by the officers as a result of her illusory fabrications (1:13:52). As she did in Austria, when Marjane denounced her heritage at a party to avoid affiliation with the regime (50:02), Marjane’s grandmother assumes the role of her moral compass, reminding her of how her family suffered whilst “defending the innocent” (1:14:23) and condemning her actions as “abominable” (1:14:03). Marjane’s grandmother completes her reprimand with the missive “in life, everyone always has a choice” (1:14:17), reiterating that Marjane must choose “integrity” (1:14:35) over acceding to fear. By taking advantage of the repressive regime’s tyranny to avoid their reproof, Marjane inadvertently sanctions their politics and dishonours her family memory, effectively ‘forgetting’ to remember the historical – and ongoing – plight of the collective.

By way of remedial action, Marjane counters this transient act of forgetting by challenging the university board and their imposition of further, seemingly arbitrary restrictions on female students’ attire. She addresses the panel, informing them of the irrationality and impracticality of the new patriarchal standards, levelling:

Is religion concerned with protecting our modesty or is it just opposed to fashion? Your criticism is always directed at women, but what about our brothers? They’re allowed to dress as they please. Sometimes they wear clothing so tight you can see their underwear. I just don’t understand why, as a woman, you don’t think I’d be affected by the sight of men in skin-tight pants, yet you’re worried they’ll get turned on by a few less inches of veil?

(1:16:38)

Satrapi empowers Marjane with the language of the regime to counter their own illogical injunctions, conveying to the viewer the hypocrisy at the heart of the patriarchal structure. Marjane’s grandmother approves of her granddaughter’s public sedition and asks Marjane to “please take off that god-awful veil”, stating that it makes her feel “claustrophobic” (1:17:04). Marjane removes her veil, assenting “I’m so used to it I forget I’m wearing it” (1:17:10). Her grandmother’s response is a resolute affirmation of Satrapi’s testimonial agenda: “Don’t ever forget it. Fear is what lulls our mind to sleep and makes us lose our conscience. Fear is also what turns us into cowards” (1:17:12-20). Marjane’s reclamation of her grandmother’s approval is underpinned by her ideological realignment with the collective, characterised by the denunciation of the regime and the imperative to

remember the sacrifices of her forebears. Through Marjane's relationship with her grandmother, Satrapi reveals how the 'not forgetting' of testimony allows her to "come to terms with her national as well as individual history" (Klapcsik, 2016: p. 80). Furthermore, the matriarch represents the resilience and resolution of the collective, through which the intra-textual empathic track (Anderst, 2015) between Marjane and her family is synonymous with the extra-textual channel between Satrapi and her compatriots.



Figure 2.4: 'Photos' of Marjane at her wedding.

Galvanised by her grandmother's approval and a renewed sense of collective identity, Marjane begins to socialise with her like-minded peers, attending underground parties as she did with her parents as a child. It is at one of these parties that Marjane's romantic relationship with Reza (Chris Mack) blossoms. However, Marjane's attraction to Reza is revealing of her enduring ideological conflict. Unlike Reza, Marjane knows the trauma of displacement experienced as a result of exile, and still yearns for the fortification of collective identity afforded by remaining in Iran. Reza dismisses Marjane's desire to stay as "nostalgic", claiming "sooner or later you'll get sick of people sticking their nose where it doesn't belong all the time" (1:17:41-46). His statement is quickly validated, as the Guardians of the Revolution witness a modest gesture of intimacy between the couple (1:17:53), resulting in a fine, paid by Marjane's father, to save her from corporal punishment (1:18:11). Marjane is demonstrably frustrated by the limitations imposed by Islamic Law, which forbids public courtship, remonstrating: "The situation is intolerable. We can't go anywhere. We're like caged animals. I feel like a prisoner. What is this? It's no life!" (1:18:51-58). Reza's pragmatic solution is marriage, which, as the montage that follows depicts, is a solution that incites further conflict for Marjane. As the camera pans images of the wedding, which are framed like still photographs – autobiographical artefacts of memory as seen in *Tarnation* and *The Tale* – Marjane's apposite, posed expressions of joy are belied by the interspersed, candid shots of her dismay, which reveal her underlying uncertainty at the hasty union (see Figure 2.4). Marjane's misgivings

are echoed by her mother, for whom Marjane's marriage equates to her own failure to secure her daughter's freedom from the repressive regime: "All I wanted was for you to be independent, educated, cultivated. And you go and get married at 21! I want you to leave Iran! I want you to be happy, and emancipated!" (1:19:32-43). However, Marjane's emancipation proves to be deferred by marriage rather than denied, as the relationship that was supposed to flourish once free of the repressive regime's scrutiny buckles due to its precipitate intensity. As the "One year later" title card indicates (1:19:49), after just twelve months of marriage the couple appear indifferent to one another, but marriage is essentially an extension of the regime's patriarchal control, as the prospect of divorce is posited as an equally undesirable alternative. Marjane's friend cites her sister's experience as a cautionary tale, claiming she was constantly propositioned after her divorce, further advising "unless your life is a nightmare, stay with your husband" (1:21:18-25). Seemingly trapped, Marjane seeks counsel from her grandmother once more, who trivialises her marital problems and reassures Marjane that divorce need not define her existence, offering her own experience as proof. Marjane's grandmother concludes "You're crying because you made a mistake. It's always hard to admit it when you're wrong" (1:21:56-1:22:44). Though reassured by her grandmother's pragmatism, the deciding factor in Marjane's ultimate emancipation is the death of a friend who falls from the roof fleeing an underground party that is raided by Guardians of the Revolution. Reminiscent of earlier scenes of imagined conflict, the male revellers are represented by faceless shadows as they leap from one building to another to escape the soldiers; the final figure hesitates before jumping, but the fall occurs off screen as the camera pans up to the moon before the screen fades to black. Although she was unable to actually see the circumstances surrounding Nima's death – on screen Marjane is detained in the apartment below – Satrapi chooses to bear witness to the event in the same manner that she portrays other significant traumatic incidents throughout the autofilmic testimony, through austere imagery and minimal commentary that at once acknowledges the "unrepresentability" of trauma (Caruth, 2016: p. 131) whilst simultaneously repudiating the same. Significantly, Nima's death, like the revolution and the war that preceded it, irrevocably alters Marjane's sense of belonging, and permanently dissolves her capacity to conform. Despondent after the senseless loss of another close friend at the hands of the regime, Marjane returns home where she bluntly states "It's over, Reza" (1:25:38). Confirming Marjane's inability to withstand the ongoing repression of the Islamic Regime, the narrating 'I' attests in the voiceover: "The time had come for me to leave" (1:25:44). Subsequently, after paying her respects to her country and her family, Marjane divorces Reza and leaves Iran for good, in a conclusive act of resistance that secures her liberation.



Figure 2.5: *Marjane leaves the airport as the unified testimonial 'I'.*

To confirm the autobiographical subject's posttraumatic "reconciliation" through the articulation of traumatic experience (Laub, 1995: p. 74), the autofilmic testimony concludes with the experiencing 'I' and the narrating 'I' converging as the unified, embodied testimonial 'I' on screen: the picture shifts from black and white to colour outside the Orly Sud airport in Paris, and the frame narrator, Marjane, is driven away in a taxi (see Figure 2.5). As the narrated past meets the diegetic present, the film's status as testimony is authorised by the narrating 'I's occupation of both the frame and the narrative as the experiencing 'I' of self-witness. Whereas Jennifer and Jenny share the final scene of *The Tale* as the unified iteration of the cooperative testimonial 'I', Satrapi depicts Marjane as a singular entity, emphasising the "repossession" (Laub, 1995: p. 70) of identity enabled by her permanent emancipation from Iran. The film closes with a disembodied exchange between Marji and her grandmother, which references a scene from earlier in the film: the night before Marji leaves Iran the first time, her grandmother stays with her, and the frame narrator remarks upon the jasmine flowers the elder woman keeps in her bra (38:45-39:03). This repetitious, symbolic coda of not forgetting underscores Satrapi's autofilmic testimonial agenda. By commemorating her beloved grandmother, who died just over a year after she left (*Persepolis*: p. 343), Satrapi acknowledges the relational construction of her own identity as a member of the traumatised collective. She also offers up a final, relatable empathic track that demonstrates for the viewer both the magnitude of her loss, and the liberating labour of testimonial not forgetting.

Both *The Tale* and the animated *Persepolis* draw attention to their cinematic mediation in a way that inscribes the vocational creative practices of their respective author-subjects.

As a result, each film is recognisable as autobiographical portraiture, which encompasses each subject's unique mode of performative testimony in the propagation of self-witness. Underscored by the retention of the real name, both Fox's and Satrapi's autofilmic testimonies are boldly self-referential, attesting to autobiographical experience, each with a profound and personal perspective on trauma, to which they invite the viewer to bear witness.

The subjective perspective, generated through recognisably autofilmic conventions that adopt both the subjects' literal and ideological points of view, issues the testimonial invitation to cinematic I-witnessing, fortified by the relational tracks of empathy constructed through intra- and extra-textual narrative strategies. According to Dominick La Capra:

The importance of testimonies becomes more apparent when they are related to the way they provide something other than purely documentary knowledge [...] in the attempt to understand experience and its aftermath, including the role of memory and its lapses, in coming to terms with – or denying and repressing – the past.

(2014: pp. 86-7)

For both Fox and Satrapi, self-witnessing entails empathic 'show and tell', with cinematic media utilised to trace the subjective labour of remembering and not forgetting as part of a greater testimonial agenda. In bringing the "unrepresentability" (Caruth, 2016: p. 131) of trauma to the screen as autofilmic testimony, each of the women installs the viewer as both "the immediate receiver" of testimony and the willing witness to witnessing (Laub, 1995: p. 61-2) within a broader cultural context. In the acceptance of the inevitable responsibility of metonymy, or "representativeness" (Gilmore, 2001), both Fox and Satrapi recognise the ethical imperative of bearing witness to endemic traumas that are inherently unspeakable and resistant to representation. Using relational and invitational strategies to trace the tracks of empathy within self-witnessing testimony, the films reach beyond their cinematic narratives to the audience, seeking intersubjective engagement beyond the experience of the individual. As a result, both Fox and Satrapi use testimony as "a form of action" (Laub, 1995: p. 70), as both a personal processing tool that enables existential "reconciliation" (Laub, 1995: p. 74) and a valiant, visible vindication for those they feel they represent. Ultimately, within the continuum of Contemporary Cinematic I-Witnessing, these autofilmic testimonies in the form of narrative films provide an ethical and empathic representation of experience that bears witness to the impact and investigation of trauma, whilst it perpetuates the witnessing paradigm as a lasting form of advocacy for real others.

Section Two: Auteurbiography

All it takes is for the filmmakers to have enough visual imagination to create the cinematic equivalent of the style of the original, and for the critic to have the eyes to see it.

Andre Bazin

We are seen from the outside by our neighbors; but we remain always at the back of our eyes and our senses, situated in our bodies, like a driver in the front seat of a car seeing the other cars coming toward him. A single person . . . is one consciousness within one machine, confronting all the other traffic.

Stephen Spender

3. Auteurbiography as Secondary Testimony: Adapting Self-Witness in *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*

The conception of autofilmic testimony advanced in Section One determines that the subjective perspective that can convey autobiographical experience on film is predicated on the recognisable conventions of the first-person mode of address. The use of specific narrative and framing techniques identify the autobiographical subject as the self-witness and empathic target of the film narrative, to instantiate an intersubjective pact between the autobiographical subject and the viewer that is tantamount to testimonial witnessing. The ways in which a film narrative can issue the autobiographical invitation are inevitably defined by the representation of an embodied autobiographical subject, and their authoritative enunciation of the self-referential 'I' within the filmic discourse.

Fundamentally, autofilmic testimony is self-made and self-referential, but as Chapter Two demonstrates, the embodied subject on screen is not always necessarily the subject themselves. The substitution of an actor or drawn character in the subject position signals the interstitial distance between the autobiographical subject and their narrated 'I'; however, the filmmaker-subject encodes the autobiographical subjective perspective in the filmic discourse, which is then authorised by the inscription of the real name.

Consequently, the autobiographical 'I' of self-witness is preserved, and the autobiographical invitation to testimonial witnessing remains intact. To expand the scope of Contemporary Cinematic I-Witnessing in Section Two, I ask: how can films that are not self-reflexive invite viewers to bear witness to subjective truth? How is the autobiographical invitation adapted? And what are the parameters for a viewership pact that can elide the increased distance between the subject and their autobiographical narrative?

The Diving Bell and the Butterfly is a memoir by Jean-Dominique Bauby, in which he offers a personal account of his experience of Locked-In Syndrome: a rare neurological condition that rendered him almost entirely paralysed after a stroke. Bauby's cognitive function remained intact, and, in spite of his physical debility, he was able to communicate

using a system introduced by his therapists in hospital, whereby a series of letters would be read aloud to him and he would construct words and sentences by blinking his functioning left eye to indicate a specific letter at a time. Using this method, Bauby was able to dictate his memoir in only two months whilst receiving medical care at Berck-sur-Mer in his native France, with the manuscript achieving publication just two days prior to his death. Bauby's memoir constitutes literary self-witnessing, on the basis of his self-referential account of personal trauma and autobiographical experience. The unique method used by Bauby to construct his memoir foregrounds the emissary process, which helps to illustrate the ethical and empathic approach to adaptation that I theorise in this chapter.

My analysis of Bauby's memoir, and the process by which it was adapted to film develops the cinematic I-witnessing approach that underpins this study, bringing to the fore the ethics of secondary witnessing in the process of adaptation, and the necessary *pactual integrity* at the heart of the transmedial endeavour. The analysis considers the cinematic rendering of autobiographical experience in terms of embodiment, empathy, and the subjective point of view, to explicate the degrees of separation throughout the adaptive process in an introductory exploration of *auteurbiography*. The analysis encompasses each of the three constitutive discursual levels of the filmic adaptation of *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (Schnabel, 2007): the source memoir, the screenplay, and the film text, to consider the collective responsibility of the *auteurial équipe* in the cinematic preservation of the autobiographical invitation to bear witness.

Adaptation as Auteurbiography

Adaptation theory navigates the vexed question of fidelity, contending with the "implicit assumption that the literary 'original' is *better* than the screen adaptation" (original italics, Baker 2009: p. 6). Notions of 'successful' transpositions from page to screen are often conceived on the basis that the film must accurately "capture what we see as the fundamental narrative thematic, and aesthetic features of its literary source" (Stam, 2005: p. 3), which privileges logocentric prejudices and a staunch comparative perspective. Such views place the source text and the adapted text in opposition, overlooking the ways in which the transmedial transposition of a narrative can potentially enrich and expand upon an author's existing literary vision. As Robert Stam acknowledges, "filmic adaptation is *automatically* different and original due to the change of medium" (original italics, 2005: p. 17); but, different and original does not automatically equate to worse, nor to better. The difference must account for the requisite, representational alterations that take place in the reconfiguration of narrative from words on a page to audiovisual imagery on screen,

and originality encapsulates the creative labour and resultant, reformulated product of that reinterpretation (Hutcheon, 2013: p. 18). For Andre Bazin, “what matters is the *equivalence in meaning of the forms*” (original italics, 2000: p. 20), a concept that this chapter will explore within the testimonial scope of cinematic I-witnessing.

According to Linda Hutcheon, an adapted text is derived from a source text without being derivative, functioning instead as “its own palimpsestic thing” (2013: p. 9) in that it carries the residual traces of the source text(s) from which it is adapted without an assertion of absolute replication. With this in mind, Hutcheon’s parameters for adaptation propose that an adapted text should be:

- An acknowledged transposition of a recognisable other work or works
- A creative *and* an interpretive act of appropriation/salvaging
- An extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work

(original italics, Hutcheon, 2013: p. 8)

Hutcheon’s approach determines the process by which an adapted text reinscribes the source material, but also implicates the adapter as both reader and subsequently auteur within this process. These roles are particularly pertinent to the adaptation of autobiographical narratives as a form of secondary witnessing, as will become clear in the following case study. The ‘creative’ and ‘interpretive’ aspects of the adaptation process complicate the contractual understanding of the autobiographical ‘I’ and its inherently unilateral construction as the coincidence of author, narrator and protagonist (Lejeune, 1989), as the adaptive process often encompasses the many-handed input of cinematic production. Conversely, adaptation offers a way out of this impasse, as the prospect of ‘appropriation or salvaging’ implies that the adapter can and should reclaim and retrieve as much of the source text as possible in an ‘acknowledged transposition’ that should make explicit the ‘adapted work’ from whence said material came. Within the testimonial context of cinematic I-witnessing, filmic adaptations carry the ethical and empathic responsibility of representing – and re-presenting – the autobiographical invitation in a way that is indicative of the adapter’s own willing engagement with the subject’s literary testimony, and which retraces and reinvents emersive engagement for the viewer to preserve the subjective “truth value” (Bruss, 1980) of the literary source.

The empathic invitation that manifests through a willing engagement with a literary autobiography as testimony can be reissued by a cinematic adaptation that privileges the experiential reality of the autobiographical subject. Schmitt explains: “the affects and

percepts generated by a narrative, be it a film or a book, are not linked to what it describes but to the experience it creates” (Schmitt, 2017: p. 120); it is the engagement with, and the transposition of, this narratively created experience that is the goal of the adapted film. Consequently, the adapters’ ability to ‘feel with’ the autobiographical subject is dependent upon the intimacy and empathic relation facilitated through the reading of their narrative. The testimonial goad of the adaptive endeavour, then, is to preserve and transcode the same intersubjective invitation that the author achieves in the literary source, so as to prompt a cognate mode of viewership.

With an amanuensis at his disposal, Jean-Dominique Bauby was able to produce his 139-page illness memoir, *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* (1997) (hereafter *The Diving Bell*), letter by letter, in a matter of months, whilst in a state of almost total paralysis following a stroke. Bauby’s intimate account articulates his subsequent experience of Locked-In syndrome, an account characterised by introspection, imagination and nostalgia, in an acute, testimonial exploration of embodied, vulnerable subjectivity. *The Diving Bell* was adapted into a film of the same name in 2007, directed by artist Julian Schnabel, with a screenplay by Ron Harwood. This chapter maps the ways in which Bauby’s unique experience of vulnerable subjectivity is captured, first in print, and then, through the multiple discourse levels of adaptation, as a testimonial film that preserves Bauby’s experiential reality. The analysis considers the privileging of fidelity in adapting autobiographical self-witness, with a critical focus on vulnerable subjectivity, to develop the cinematic I-witnessing approach that underpins this thesis. I explore the relationship between ethical and empathic engagement with testimonial narratives as bearing witness, and the necessary pactual integrity of adaptive practices towards the preservation of the subject’s autobiographical invitation. The following analysis identifies the ways in which a cinematic adaptation of literary self-witness retains the “resonance [of] autobiography as an echo of physical experience” (2017: p. 22), to emphasise the ethical and empathic obligations to fidelity within a testimonial context.

The chapter begins with an overview of what constitutes a narrative of witness in the context of vulnerable subjectivity to frame the analysis of Bauby’s memoir as literary self-witnessing, with emphasis upon embodied subjectivity, authorship, and the reclamation of agency. Then, an examination of the filmic adaptation, encompassing both the product and the process, reveals the parameters of cinematic secondary witnessing, designated auteurbiography within the continuum of Contemporary Cinematic I-Witnessing, as an ethical and biographical endeavour that encompasses the preservation and propagation

of the autobiographical invitation by recognisably referential cinematic means. The chapter demonstrates that an auteurbiographical adaptation can, and must, privilege the lived experience of the autobiographical subject within the filmic narrative – and throughout the adaptive process – to instantiate the ethical and empathic intersubjective witnessing structure of cinematic I-witnessing.

Vulnerable Subjectivity and Embodied Witnessing

Illness and injury can hamper a potential autobiographer, with life-limiting conditions and disabilities making the physical labour of writing difficult or even impossible. Ironically, the circumstances and causes of such incapacity can often be the impetus for self-life writing, particularly in those with previous experience of writing, as Arthur Frank notes in *The Wounded Storyteller* (2013). In his book, Frank identifies three types of “wounded storytelling”. Firstly, the restitution narrative, which follows a reflective and somewhat optimistic narrative pattern: “yesterday I was healthy, today I’m sick, but tomorrow I’ll be healthy again” (p. 77). Secondly, the chaos narrative, which “imagines life never getting better” (p. 97) with the narrative characterised by a particularly pessimistic inflection. And finally, the quest narrative, which includes “memoirs”, as narratives of retrospect and re-evaluation prompted by illness; “manifestos”, as resistant and defiant calls to social action, whereby the subject aims to “use [their] suffering to move others forward with them” (p. 121); and “automythology” (p. 119), in which the subject philosophises survival as rebirth and renewal. Each narrative type sees an author exploring their experience of illness through self-reflexive storytelling, but with differing perspectives, and Frank acknowledges what he describes as the kaleidoscopic overlap of these types in any illness narrative, noting that the focus will inevitably shift over the course of the self-story (p. 76).

G. Thomas Couser would include wounded storytellers under the designation “vulnerable subjects”, which he defines as “people with disadvantaging or stigmatizing conditions” and those “who may be vulnerable to misrepresentation and exploitation” (2004: p. 14) as a consequence. The will to write, coupled with the risks and restrictions of wounded and/or vulnerable subjectivity can mean that undertaking the act of autobiographical self-witnessing becomes a complex physical and psychological negotiation of authorial agency. The vulnerable subject’s compulsion to assert their own autobiographical voice accords with Frank’s description of “postmodern illness” as “an experience, a reflection on body, self, and the destination that life’s map leads to”, which leaves vulnerable subjects “feeling a need for a voice they can recognise as their own” (Frank, 2013: p. 7). Contrary to modernist medicine’s preoccupation with control and eradication, “postmodern illness culture”, Frank argues, “recognises a need to accept suffering as an intractable part of the human condition” (2013: p. 146), with autobiographical accounts of this suffering

considered “embodied witnessing” (Frank, 2013: p. 142). Similarly, for Arnaud Schmitt, “autobiography is an embodied textual experience” (2017: p. 22), which “focuses on the reality of one person” (2017: p. 122). Accordingly, autobiographical accounts of vulnerable subjectivity constitute embodied self-witness, as a testimonial assertion of personal experience and agency.

‘The Dream’ chapter of *The Diving Bell* epitomises the passivity that Bauby feels as a consequence of his condition, metaphorically describing his experience of Locked-In Syndrome. In his description of his dream, Bauby is “petrified, mummified, vitrified” (p. 60) and unable to assert bodily autonomy in order to stop drinking or avoid being carried against his will. In his dream, Bauby is a “hostage of a mysterious cult”, afraid that his loved ones “will fall into the same trap” from which he is unable to escape (p. 60). He concludes that his fate is the consequence of his silence: “my dream conforms perfectly with reality. I am unable to utter a word” (p. 60). Bauby’s reflections on his dream, though not representative of real life events, encompasses the limiting reality of his experience as confined to largely incommunicable inertia, whilst illustrating the potential liberation that communicability can offer. Schmitt disavows the “deep misconception of what autobiography is about”, noting that “[autobiography] has never been about truth (although *veracity* is one of its most prominent features), it has always been about *reality*, about *experience*” (original italics, Schmitt, 2017: p. 43). Bauby’s condition leaves him feeling contained, both literally and intellectually, which is the definitive, traumatic inflection of his experiential reality that characterises his testimonial perspective.

Bauby’s paralysis severely limits his ability to communicate, which exacerbates the feelings of containment and isolation that define the “struggle” to process and articulate traumatic experience (Laub, 1995). In the chapter entitled ‘Guardian Angel’, Bauby describes at length the value of “the communication code without which [he] would be cut off from the world” (p. 47), for which he credits his speech therapist, Sandrine, as the chapter’s titular guardian angel. Bauby claims that the implementation of the dictation system makes “the invisible and eternally imprisoning cocoon” of Locked-In Syndrome “less oppressive” (p. 48), but expresses disdain at the ongoing limitations to his communicative capacity, and his inability to embellish conversations with his characteristic wit:

[M]y communication system disqualifies repartee: the keenest rapier grows dull and falls flat when it takes several minutes to thrust it home. By the time you strike, even you no longer understand what had seemed so witty before you started to dictate it [...]. It deprives conversation of its

sparkle [...] and I count this forced lack of humour one of the great drawbacks of my condition.

(pp. 78-9)

Bauby identifies his reduced communicability as existentially limiting, and it is this fundamental limitation that renders him contained in the metaphorical diving bell of his body. Frank observes, “[s]eriously ill people are wounded not just in body but in voice”, and as such “[t]heir injuries become the source of the potency of their story” (2013: p. xii). Consequently, self-referential narratives that bear witness to vulnerable subjectivity “do not simply describe the self; they are the self’s medium of being” (Frank, 2013: p. 53). In Bauby’s case, the communication code enables the necessary articulation of his traumatic experience, and the potential for the narrative assertion and reconciliation of selfhood.

For Bauby, his unique, physically debilitating circumstances endow him with both the content and the catalyst for his self-reflexive narrative; the authorship of his memoir provides him with an outlet for his experiential testimony as the creative reassertion of lost agency. As a writer and Editor-in-Chief of the French magazine *Elle* prior to his stroke, Bauby is predisposed to the narrative impulse, making a literary testimony a natural choice. According to psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, when “involved in an expressive activity we feel in touch with our real self” (1990: p. 188); the reconciliation of selfhood through self-witnessing, as explained in Section One, allows autobiographical subjects to “work through” – or write through – traumatic experience (LaCapra, 2014; Henke, 1998). In *The Diving Bell*, Bauby is able to reassimilate and reassert the agency he felt he had foregone as a result of his physical incapacity. It is the code implemented by his speech therapist that eventually grants Bauby the “symbolic form” (Gray, 1982: p. 33) with which he is able to give voice to his ineluctably embodied autobiographical experience in his own words, which concurrently gives him a sense of purpose:

My main task now is to compose the first of these bedridden travel notes so that I shall be ready when my publisher’s emissary arrives to take my dictation, letter by letter. In my head I churn over every sentence ten times, delete a word, add an adjective, and learn my text by heart, paragraph by paragraph.

(p. 13)

Bauby’s final days and weeks were dominated by the construction and dictation of his testimonial narrative, as a creative preoccupation that reconfigured and reasserted agency and voice.

Bauby's best-selling memoir is notable for its unconventional authorship, with much critical focus on the practicalities of its production. Undeniably, the actual writing process is central to Bauby's self-referential narrative, which documents the practice as fundamental to the reclamation of agency. According to Monika Fludernik:

Experientiality in narrative of personal experience consists in the dynamic interrelation between the description of personal experience on the one hand (the setting-plus-incidence core of the narrative episode) and the evaluative and rememorative transformation of this experience in the storytelling process: tellability and point of the story dialectically constitute each other. The narrative is narrative, not because it tells a story, but because the story that it tells is reportable and has been reinterpreted by the narrating I, the personal storyteller [...]. A complex organic unity is established which balances experience in the raw and the storyteller's re-evaluation of it.

(1996: p. 70)

Bauby's memoir is an unmistakable re-evaluation of his experience, which manifests a metaphorical dichotomy between the 'diving bell' of Locked-In Syndrome and the 'butterfly' of his nostalgic imagination. Bauby affirms this re-evaluative ideal, questioning "does it take the glare of disaster to show a person's true nature?" (p. 91). He refers to the compassion of others when he makes this observation in the memoir, but his inquiry is inherently introspective within the context of his self-referential "quest narrative" (Frank, 2013: p. 119). The question is ambiguous, indicative of the re-evaluation that characterises Bauby's self-witnessing introspection; in questioning the 'true nature' of others, Bauby also invites the same scrutiny of himself.

In the penultimate chapter, 'A Day in the Life' – the title graphologically foregrounded by the use of quotation marks, signposting its significance from the outset – Bauby concedes that the chapter's content is representative of the intersection between tellability and the point of the story in his testimonial narrative, remarking "Ever since beginning this book I have intended to describe my last moments as a perfectly functioning earthling" (p. 127): the day he suffered his stroke. Bauby first mentions the date 'Friday, 8 December' (p. 11) on the first page of the prologue, but does not bring it up again until he describes it as "that disastrous Friday, 8 December 1995" (p. 127) over 100 pages later. What follows in the penultimate chapter is the detailed record of his memory of that day, willingly suppressed until this belated point of disclosure, to provide the narrative reconciliation of the traumatic experience that defines his self-witnessing testimony. The narrative is

effectively bookended by the narrating 'I's reference to the date he was rendered a vulnerable subject, which highlights the incident's significance, as the traumatic moment that underwrites his self-witnessing narrative. What fills the pages between is "the setting-plus-incidence core of the narrative" (Fludernik, 1996: p. 70), which delimits the experiential prism through which Bauby navigates the five dimensions of autobiographical subjectivity – memory, experience, identity, embodiment and agency (Smith and Watson 2010: p. 49). Each vignette provides insight into Bauby's inescapable, embodied experience of his illness, and the reconciliatory perspective he gains through telling and re-evaluation in the construction of his memoir. Schmitt explains that "[b]eing an autobiographer is a very specific facet of our subjective lives [...]. It is part and parcel of the autobiographical mode since it involves a complex formalization of our narrative" (2017: p. 68). In formalising and structuring his experiential narrative as testimony, Bauby evaluates and bears witness to his altered subjectivity, whilst simultaneously asserting his authorial agency as an autobiographical subject.

Secondary Witnessing: The Amanuensis and The Auteurial Équipe

Where illness or physical impediment precludes a traditional, autonomous autobiographical act, the requisite involvement of an amanuensis can be thought to threaten a project's autobiographical integrity. Terms such as ghost-writer and amanuensis carry with them allusions as to the degree of creative influence a co-author exercises; how is such assistance measured, and what qualifies as permissible for autobiographical acts to remain authentic "self-stories" (Frank, 2013: p. xii)? Or, as Couser asks, "What sorts of relationships, if any, confer surrogacy in life writing?" (2004: p. xi). According to Couser:

The closer the relationship between writer and subject, and the greater the vulnerability or dependency of the subject, the higher the ethical stakes, and the more urgent the need for ethical scrutiny.

(2004: p. xii)

The notion of an autobiographical amanuensis, or surrogate, is complex, specifically in autobiographical and testimonial accounts of vulnerable subjectivity. The autobiographical amanuensis is tasked with capturing and expediting the authorial autonomy of the vulnerable subject, in a way that is distinctly and recognisably theirs, indicative of their unique circumstances, experiences, and individualistic perspective. The autobiographical amanuensis, then, must convey the multidimensional autobiographical 'I' with the same rigour as the autobiographical subject might achieve independently, whilst relinquishing creative control.

With such high ethical stakes, it would be naïve to think of an autobiographer's amanuensis as a simple scribe. The narrative relationship with the vulnerable subject requires an empathic, phenomenological connection during the emissary process as the subject makes sense of their condition and potential recovery through the act of literary self-witnessing (see Frank, 2013; Lea Gaydos, 2005; Coulehan, 2003). The vulnerable subject and their experience are intimately represented in their narrative, and the amanuensis must assimilate both from an impartial yet empathic locus. The amanuensis, then, is first cast as willing witness to self-witnessing – as the immediate receiver of testimony (see Laub, 1992) – before occupying the role of secondary witness and advocate for the vulnerable subject's testimonial narrative. When 'writing for' respectfully encompasses 'feeling with', the amanuensis is primarily a proxy rather than a co-author, as an advocate relaying rather than rewriting the author's experience, which effectively leaves the autobiographical pact intact. This role of the amanuensis as witness and emissary informs the critical perspective from which factual integrity is developed, as the conscious foregrounding of the subject's first-person perspective is imperative to the ethical and empathic adaptation of the autobiographical invitation.

Though unaccredited on the dust jacket, Claude Mendibil learned the dictation system from Bauby's therapists, and served as his authorial proxy in the production of *The Diving Bell*. Bauby's gratitude is evident in the memoir's paratextual framing, as Mendibil is second only to his children on the dedication page of the book. Though Bauby formally acknowledges Mendibil's "all-important contribution" (p. 5), his paratextual accreditation as author-subject, and Mendibil's absence as co-author, serve as a declaration of singular creative construction, installing Bauby as the Autobiographical 'I' of Lejeune's pact as author, narrator and protagonist of the text. The memoir, as self-witnessing testimony, provides detailed insight into Bauby's experience of Locked-In Syndrome, and consequent vulnerable subjectivity, part of which entails describing the process of the memoir's construction as intrinsic to its testimonial efficacy. However, *The Diving Bell* is a literal and literary record of Bauby "[calling] himself as witness to himself" (Gusdorf, 1980: p. 29), which asserts a particularly individualistic and masculine autobiographical and testimonial agenda. Consequently, the important relationship between the vulnerable subject and his amanuensis is reframed as ethical and empathic secondary witnessing, as the reception and reproduction of self-witness.

Shelley Cobb observes: "Western culture's masculine version of individual authorship as the signifier of originality, authority, and ownership is troubled by adaptation and its threat of multiple authors" (2012: p. 113); but, adapting self-witness requires an ethical and empathic approach, which is predicated on the transposition of the autobiographical

subject's experiential reality and the remediation of their testimonial narrative. Mendibil's role in the production of the memoir is a simplified conception of how the *auteurial équipe* function in the process of auteurbiographical adaptation, as the collective responsible for reissuing the subject's autobiographical invitation to bear witness in an adapted filmic form. In the adaptation of *The Diving Bell*, the *auteurial équipe* comprises: director, Julian Schnabel; screenwriter, Ron Harwood; cinematographer, Janusz Kamiński; editor, Juliette Welfling; camera/man, Berto,²⁴ as well as the producers (Kathleen Kennedy and Jon Kilik), remaining technical crew and performance cast. Prior to undertaking the creative remediation of Bauby's autobiographical experience, the *auteurial équipe* engaged with the source memoir as self-witnessing testimony, remaining mindful to return to the memoir throughout the auteurbiographical process to ensure they did not "*lose sight*" (original italics, Schmitt, 2017: p. 97) of the subject's experiential reality. In addition to an emersive reading of the source memoir, the auteurbiographical process entailed supplementary metacritical research, whereby the *auteurial équipe* conducted their own contextual investigations through literal engagement with the real-world context of the memoir's construction. This research included interviews with Bauby's friends and family, traveling to relevant locations, and learning as much as possible about the subject in order to bring additional contextual detail into the cinematic frame, effectively reducing the referential labour for the viewer. Much like the unobtrusive, emissary role of the amanuensis, the auteurbiographical adaptation process is tantamount to secondary witnessing, which encompasses engaging with the subject's testimony and then relaying the testimony on their behalf by way of remediation. In other words, the *auteurial équipe* must first bear witness, before extending the subject's invitation to the viewer through the film in a way that captures the tone and intimacy of self-witness, as witnesses to witnessing, with the requisite pactual integrity.

According to Nancy Snow, in fictional texts empathy's corresponding affect potential is dependent "on the author's ability to portray the character in believable terms"; this authorial ability "is at the heart of a description's power to elicit our empathy" (2000: pp. 69-71). The pact that underwrites the testimonial witnessing structure holds that ethical and empathic engagement with the autobiographical invitation is founded on the willingness to bear witness to the subjective truth of autobiographical experience, as established in Section One. Therefore, the assumption of the self-witnessing narrative's

²⁴ 'Berto', as he is known professionally, is referred to as 'camera/man' as he was the lead camera operator for Jean-Do's point of view shots in the film and consequently parts of his anatomy are shown on screen as Jean-Do's.

'believability' is implicit in the acceptance of the autobiographical invitation. Nevertheless, as Schmitt explains:

We, as readers, are all aware that *textual empathy* is dissimilar from *empathy based on proximity* [...]. [T]he creation of an intimate space is one of the most efficient ways to bridge the gap between these two types, albeit one that requires narrative/aesthetic skills.

(original italics, p. 121)

The intimacy of the testimonial narrative "corresponds to what is very personal and private", which Schmitt describes as "proximity transformed into a deeper emotional experience" (2017: p. 151). Similarly, Robert S. Gerstein likens the "experience of intimacy" to "an experience of a relationship" that is "so intense that it wholly shapes our consciousness and action" (1978: p. 76-7). In the memoir, Bauby institutes the ethical and empathic testimonial witnessing structure by divulging the details of his medical condition in the first two pages, reflecting on his "brutal introduction" to the condition that "snuffed out" (pp. 1-2) his former life. The intimacy of the early disclosure of Locked-In Syndrome and its medical implications shapes the way that the reader engages with the narrative as distinctly embodied self-witnessing testimony, as the autobiographical invitation is produced by the testimonial tone, and the subject's willingness to share the personal and private details of his condition, and his narrative attempt to come to terms with it. Together, tone and intimacy hasten the perceived "closeness" (Schmitt, 2017: p. 151) necessary for empathic relation, which in turn enables the reader to "acknowledge that the narrative tells the author's experience" (Schmitt, 2017: p. 90) from the vulnerable subjective perspective of self-witnessing testimony.

Bauby's memoir, as a source text, is punctuated by intimate descriptive and narrative cues that characterise the testimonial tone of his narrative of embodied self-witness. Schmitt defines the tone of an autobiographical text as "the overall impression created by the author's strategy of exposing facts and events, of narrating [him or] herself", further asserting that "tone constantly influences our relation to an autobiography, during and after reading it" to determine "our connection with it (or lack thereof)" and "how close we feel to it" (2017: p. 145). The intimate tone of *The Diving Bell* is largely characterised by Bauby's self-effacing descriptions of his embodied paralysis, which establish the corporeal claustrophobia of his condition. The limitations of Locked-In Syndrome manifest as a feeling of physical weight for Bauby: "My heels hurt, my head weighs a ton, and something like a giant invisible diving-bell holds my body prisoner" (p. 11); he also likens himself to "a hermit crab dug into his rock" (p. 11), further emphasising the physical

trappings and isolation of his paralysis. Though the experience of Locked-In Syndrome that Bauby describes is both rare, and very personal, his metaphorical descriptions are framed as the “universalizing representations” characteristic of “broadcast strategic empathy” (Keen, 2006: p. 215), thus intended to make his experience of vulnerable subjectivity relatable. As with Jarman’s bodily descriptions in Chapter One, Bauby offers insight into the profound inertia of his condition with powerful phenomenological triggers, and his metaphorical descriptions provide a referential framework that defines the testimonial tone of his narrative of self-witness. Schmitt specifies

autobiography should be redefined as *a personal account of how I experienced real events*, and not simply a personal account of real events. The distance between the two is where the aesthetic margin comes in and where the tone of the text happens.

(original italics, 2017: pp. 146-7)

The ‘aesthetic margin’ of Bauby’s vivid, descriptive narrative of physical experience, then, can solicit “[a]n echo of a cerebral effort that would have been necessary to perform the actual action” (Schmitt, 2017: p. 85), or, to perceive the limitations of inaction in Bauby’s case. This notion of resonance is strongly implicated in the phenomenological empathic engagement with the autobiographical invitation, in that the distinctive narrative description of real, lived experience, of explaining ‘what it is to be me’, carries with it a unique resonance potential. Schmitt confirms that narratives “have a bodily residue” that can “strongly influence [...] the whole idea of realism and verisimilitude” as “embedded in the words we use” (2017: p. 85). Bauby avers the specificities of his embodied experience even before divulging the cause and prognostic details of the condition, which privileges his experience, along with the resultant resonance, over the medical facts of his circumstances. The tone of the text determines the testimonial tenor of the autobiographical invitation that Bauby’s narrative issues.

Acknowledging experience as distinctly personal is integral to Schmitt’s notion of autobiography as “an embodied textual experience” that can incorporate “the concept of resonance [...] as an echo of physical experience” (2017: p. 22). For Schmitt “the idea of resonance” is contingent upon the notion that the experiential narrative “constantly brings us back to who we are as minds but also as bodies” (p. 123). Recognising the otherness of Bauby’s material body, and of his exclusively embodied static state elicits “embodied cognition”, which Schmitt avers “can be used to imagine the body of the other, its experience and, possibly, its suffering” (2017: p. 126). Schmitt goes on to define this kind

of embodied resonance for the reader as: “a very pragmatic kind of transcendence”, which involves:

meeting someone halfway, putting oneself in somebody else’s shoes
while reducing the ‘self level’ as much as possible; also converting
cognitive phenomena like ‘bodily residue’ or more general forms of
resonance into echoes of what it is to be someone else.

(pp. 129-30)

However, this kind of feeling with the subjective, embodied experience of illness and disability is ethically contentious. The inherent tension in bearing witness to vulnerable subjectivity with the kind of bodily empathy Schmitt describes means that the reader is at risk of effacing the very otherness that Bauby’s narrative inevitably submits. Robert Eaglestone describes the “paradoxical ‘doubleness’” inherent in testimonial narratives, which, by their very nature, invite “identification” whilst they simultaneously “prohibit” the same (2002: pp. 118-9). But, reading autobiography as self-witnessing testimony designates the reader’s ethical approach, whereby the reader as testimonial witness acknowledges the necessary epistemological distance that the textual boundary installs against identification. Arguably, bearing witness entails the referential recognition of embodied cognition as a “wish feeling” (Ahmed, 2004: p. 30), which Sara Ahmed describes as feeling “something other than what another feels in the very moment of imagining they could feel what another feels” (2004, p. 30) as opposed to conceptions of empathy as material understanding. Unlike identification, empathy, as Plantinga explains, is better understood as a congruent response (1999: p. 245). In *The Diving Bell*, empathic relation is predicated on the “intimacy” (Schmitt, 2017: p. 151) that manifests between the reader and the subject as embodied witness, as facilitated by Bauby’s narrative strategies for inviting empathy and the text’s testimonial tone. Consequently, the ethical and empathic witnessing of Bauby’s narrative of self-witness entails that the reader acknowledges the experience of resonance as a willingness to engage the textual empathy characterised by the intimacy of Bauby’s candid and vivid descriptions of his embodied autobiographical experience.

Fundamentally, the contingent transposition of Bauby’s autobiographical invitation to bear witness hinges upon the faithful and testimonial adaptation of tone and intimacy, and the resultant structure of empathic relation that characterises his memoir as embodied self-witness. The engagement with and subsequent remediation of the embodied, testimonial perspective of self-witness is integral to the fidelity-based notion of factual integrity upon which the prospect of an auteurbiographical adaptation of autobiography relies. Adapting

the characteristic first-person interiority of Bauby's testimonial narrative for the screen was the foremost challenge for screenwriter, Ron Harwood, who admitted that he initially struggled to conceive of a way to do so. He came to the realisation that, in order to expedite an essentially intimate interpretation of Bauby's memoir, he had to "put the audience in the place of the man" ('Behind the Camera', 2013: 6:19) in order to facilitate the equivalent autodiegetic (Genette, 1980: p. 245) narration. As a result, Harwood's screenplay narrative is conveyed from Jean-Do's static, embodied perspective, with his point of view established on the first page:

INT. JEAN-DO'S ROOM, NAVAL HOSPITAL - DAY

Blackness. Silence.

The blackness slowly, very slowly, begins to lighten.

As if at a distance THE SOUND OF TWO VOICES, a man's and a woman's chatting, little more than intermittent murmurs.

Then, suddenly close:

[...]

Like a flickering eyelid a picture begins to take shape: a small bare hospital Room, the faces of the NURSES either side of a bed, both looking down expectantly, directly into CAMERA.

THE CAMERA IS JEAN-DOMINIQUE BAUBY, KNOWN AS JEAN-DO.

As his eyes open he sees first the foot of his bed, the curled, paralysed hands on the yellow sheets, the IV pole hanging over him, and THE TWO NURSES, smiling, leaning towards him.

Harwood establishes Jean-Do's embodied perspective through the configuration of the subjective camera, which is a recognised, first-person convention of autobiographical films that allows the viewer to see what the subject sees (Gernalzick, 2006). Following Daniel Dennett's conception of "heterophenomenology" (1991: p. 72), Schmitt asserts that the empathic engagement with autobiography as a subjective account of real experience is a phenomenological encounter galvanised by "*the capacity of putting yourself in somebody else's place*" (original italics, Schmitt, 2017: p. 74). Dennett defines heterophenomenology as "a method of phenomenological description that can (in principle) do justice to the most private and ineffable subjective experience while never abandoning the methodological scruples of science" (1991: p. 72), which Schmitt further describes as requiring "great intellectual effort" (2017: p. 74). Schmitt's notion of "experiencing" autobiography as real takes heterophenomenology as "one of the keys, if not the main key" that can "open the door leading to the experience of otherness" (2017: p. 74). Placing the reader *within* the confines of Jean-Do's body from the outset is a heterophenomenological gesture meant to recreate the 'intimate space' of Bauby's source narrative, locating his embodied experience in the foreground prior to any kind of causal, exterior explication. Consequently, Harwood initiates engagement with Bauby's autobiographical invitation in the screenplay through the literal advent of embodied perspective taking.

The film makes use of the recognisable first-person convention of subjective perspective with accompanying voiceover, as explained in Section One, to convey Jean-Do's narrating 'I'. In the opening scenes, as Jean-Do awakens from his coma, the swing and tilt lens settles in and out of focus; the effect of blinking is created by black, block edits and by the camera/man (Berto) closing and reopening his fingers over the lens. The framing of the fixed shot indicates Jean-Do's bedbound stasis, as the figures of two nurses – one female, one male – become clearer, briefly, as the camera eye 'blinks', with pink roses visible in the foreground to the right edge of the frame. The nurses notice Jean-Do's awakening, instructing him to keep his eyes open, and the female nurse looms invasively into extreme, but blurred close up as she informs him "You've been asleep for a long time. Now you're waking up" (1:50-2:30). The doctor arrives at Jean-Do's room, his head initially cut out of the frame due to the low angle of the camera's perspective, and the viewer hears Jean-Do's voice as he recognises and remarks upon the hospital setting (2:31). The doctor leans in to extreme close-up, his eye dominating the frame, and he repeats the instruction: "Mr. Bauby, open your eyes wide. Try to keep them open" (2:35).

Jean-Do can be heard groaning as the doctor's eye is replaced by a white-blue pen light that all but floods the frame; the fixed gaze of the camera fails to follow it as it tracks across the screen from left to right and out of shot before it returns, accompanied by Jean-Do's weak protest of "no, no" in the voiceover (2:40-2:55). It is quickly established that the camera eye *is* Jean-Do's, and the viewer sees what he sees with the same limited capacity. As Jean-Do's environment is revealed piecemeal at the periphery of his blurred vision, the shot is never reversed to reveal the source of the point of view, as is the usual convention (see Carroll, 1999), deliberately withholding the image of the body and restricting the viewer's gaze to his limited perspective. The effect of this extreme interiority and limited first-person point of view is a heterophenomenological rendering of embodied vulnerable subjectivity, that reproduces the invitation of embodied self-witness by placing the viewer *within* the intimate, embodied position of the narrating 'I'.

Reproducing the "textual surface" and "site of autobiographical knowledge" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 37) that is Bauby's body is crucial to the film adaptation, not only visually, but also in terms of the narrative's heterophenomenological potential for resonance, in line with Bauby's literary source. The embodied resonance that accompanies viewership (much like the embodied cognition mentioned above) relates to the precognitive faculty of our brains, which permits a kind of neurological mimesis for the actions witnessed and read (see Freedberg and Galese, 2007: p. 202, and Iacoboni, 2008: pp. 94-5). Reading and experiencing Jean-Do's body in the film, both through the story and *as* the story of his experience, expedites "the resonance of another life" (Schmitt, 2017: p. 30) at the core of autobiographical telling. Schmitt explains that "resonance can be recycled to read what being someone else actually is" and that "memories of my pain can help me measure to some extent the pain suffered by someone else" (2017: pp. 129-30). This works on the understanding that autobiography requires "collaborative work and shared re-enactment" (pp.129-30) towards feeling with the unique experience of the autobiographical other; this includes the embodied 'echo' of stasis and containment as described by Jean-Dominique Bauby. According to Smith and Watson, autobiographical acts in visual media "can palpably push the autobiographical to the very interior of the body" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 175). The effect of this interiority in the memoir is such that the reader is given access to Bauby's confined, physical experience of Locked-in Syndrome through candid, affective description. In the memoir, Bauby describes the stitching closed of his failing right eye:

When I came to that late-January morning, the hospital ophthalmologist was leaning over me and sewing my right eyelid shut with a needle and thread, just as if he were darning a sock. Irrational terror swept over me.

What if this man got carried away and sewed up my left eye as well, my only link to the outside world, the only window to my cell, the one tiny opening of my cocoon?

(p. 61)

Bauby experiences this ordeal from within his body, his eye the metaphorical porthole in his bodily diving bell. This scene is viscerally recreated on screen, with Jean-Do's voiceover narrating the panic that accompanies the camera's prosthetic 'eyelid' slowly closing one stitch at a time: "Stay away from me. Please, I'm begging you [...]. Please don't close my eyes. Please" (15:30-15:42). The frame gradually shrinks to mimic the closing lid, obscuring the vision of the camera eye with the resultant darkness as the needle repeatedly pierces the substitute skin (15:35-16:10) (see Figure 3.1). Though Bauby's eye was, in reality, already failing, in the film, the sealing of the eye is symbolic of Jean-Do's retreat into the cerebral world of Locked-In Syndrome, creating a physical barrier between him and the outside world. This moment in the memoir signifies a chaotic shift in the narrative (see Frank, 2013), as Bauby is unable to see, both physically and metaphorically, an end to his physical containment. The correspondent scene in the film concludes with the first reverse shot of Jean-Do as a vulnerable subject, yet it shows nothing more than his eyes – first his working left eye, panning to the sealed right eye – in order to verify the reality of the sutures and the fragility of the remaining ocular connection between the subject and his environment (16:17-16:20). The heterophenomenological transposition of this visceral experience enables the viewer to empathise with Jean-Do's – and referentially, Bauby's – embodied experience of vulnerable subjectivity, and the material and psychological effects of the condition.



Figure 3.1: *The stitching closed of Jean-Do's eye from his subjective perspective.*

Adopting the literal perspective of the subject not only invokes the documentary invitation that prompts viewers' expectations of truth-telling (Plantinga, 2010), but also places the

viewer within the inert body of the vulnerable subject with an authenticating effect. In her article 'Mediated Immediacy: Constructing Authentic Testimony in Audio-Visual Media' (2017), Sara Jones avers "the body of the witness testifies to the authenticity of his or her experience" (p. 146) in the context of mediated testimony. Likewise, Couser argues for the realistic representation of the embodied subject in graphic somatography, as the necessary visibility and acknowledgement of the "embodied experience of impairment" (2018: p. 350) in an otherwise liberal, visual autobiographical mode. As established in Section One, the material body of the autobiographical subject – and empathic target – is a requisite referential anchor within the filmic autobiographical mode of bearing witness. However, the complete physical figure of Jean-Do's narrated 'I', the 'locked-in' body of Jean-Do as situated in the film's temporal present, is only revealed after he engages with the communication code that re-establishes his link to the outside world. Prior to the implementation of the communication code, the physical figure of the narrating 'I' of self-witness is withheld: Jean-Do is spoken to, and about, but his speaking voice is heard as remote and characterised as interior monologue through voiceover. The viewer is initially denied a complete visual of Jean-Do's physical body – aside from an opaque reflection of his face as he is wheeled down the corridor (17:12-17:31) – the withholding of which challenges the viewer's emersive reconciliation of the empathic target on screen as a real person. But, although Jean-Do's body in its entirety remains concealed from the viewer, his 'whole' is metonymically envisaged as a consequence of the embodied perspective, as "hidden parts of objects are visually experienced because they are present in absence" (Gray and Tanesini, 2010: p. 721). The effect of withholding the visual of Jean-Do's material body patents the depicted experience as uniquely his, by limiting the exterior, omniscient point of view and gaze of the orthodox cinematic repertoire, to reinforce the exclusive, embodied, self-witnessing intimacy of Bauby's autobiographical invitation.

Although actor Mathieu Amalric personified Jean-Dominique Bauby for the purposes of the film, he was not always physically present in each scene during filming. In order to replicate the interiority of Bauby's narrating 'I' in the moment, Schnabel kept Amalric separate from the filmed action in shots where Jean-Do's body is unseen in its entirety; it was often unnecessary for him to be in situ as the camera provided the focal substitute for Jean-Do for the other actors. Jean-Do's reactions, by way of interior monologue, were created by placing Amalric in a sound booth with a monitor, so that he was able to react to exactly what the camera was seeing, and equally, the camera/man wore an earpiece so that he could react to Amalric's dialogue accordingly, as the camera eye surveyed the hospital setting and attendant staff. These organic and connected reactions to action, in

line with Bauby's experience, conceal the bilateral façade of camera/man and Amalric, achieving a seemingly unified reenactment of Bauby's autobiographical 'I'.

Harwood describes the deployment of Jean-Do's point of view in his narrative transcription as "a washing line" on which he could "hang anything" (Harwood in MovieWeb, 2010: 0:33). This metaphor is useful in as much as it describes Jean-Do's point of view in terms of a narrative support structure that also provides a platform on which the multiplicity of autobiographical subjectivity can be arranged. The five dimensions of autobiographical subjectivity – memory, experience, identity, embodiment and agency (Smith and Watson 2010: p. 49) – can be assembled and assimilated as a result of this individualised and interior perspective. Using Jean-Do's contained point of view permits the essential spatiotemporal shifts necessary to convey these dimensions effectively, by also providing the inner, creative space of his imagination as a narrative resource: the butterfly of the memoir's title. In one such butterfly scene in Harwood's screenplay, Jean-Do asserts the tractability this consciousness affords him:

JEAN-DO'S VOICE (cont'd)

- I can imagine anything, anything at all.

Sudden silence.

CLOSER - THE SKIER - JEAN-DO

He's wearing goggles with orange lenses and a ski cap. He **smiles** with exhilaration as he makes the descent.

JEAN-DO'S VOICE (cont'd)

And now I want to remember myself as I
was. Handsome, debonair, glamorous.
And devilishly attractive -

He swerves to a halt, raising snow. He pushes his glasses on to his

forehead and pulls off his ski cap. He smiles while he catches his breath.

VERY CLOSE - JEAN-DO

As he was, aged 42, at his peak, splendid, fit, tanned.

(Harwood, p. 39)

In this scene from the screenplay, John-Do announces his capacity for cerebral gymnastics, signalling changes in narrative direction from imagination to memory at will. Furthermore, this scene offers some insight into the identity, embodiment and agency of “the ‘real’ or historical ‘I’” as the “flesh-and-blood person” (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 72); Jean-Do is presented as a strong and capable masculine subject (Connell and Messerschmidt, 2005), in line with Bauby’s descriptions of himself and his past, pre-stroke life in the memoir.

Bauby’s imaginative flexibility grants the auteurial équipe the same scope and creative freedom to represent the comprehensive prism of autobiographical subjectivity in the cinematic adaptation, which director, Julian Schnabel confirms:

as a filmmaker [...] you could put anything you want into this movie, whatever comes to this guy’s mind is possible, and so that would vary the structure [...]. It gave me absolute freedom to do whatever I wanted.

(PathéUK, 2007: 2:04)

The freedom to which Schnabel gestures speaks to the “incorrigibility of first-person reports of mental states” (Rorty, 1970: p. 399), which for Robert B. Brandom constitutes the “*perfect* epistemic accessibility” of the mind: “it is the realm where error and ignorance are impossible – what’s happening in one’s mind is exactly whatever one *thinks* is going on” (original italics, 2000: p. 157). Bauby’s literary testimony is an episodic collage of reminiscence on past relationships, dreams, and philosophical musings on life and literature, given context by the day-to-day reportage of his contrasting experience of vulnerable subjectivity. The film transposes the meandering episodic structure of the memoir, with the creative freedom afforded by the flexibility and ‘incorrigibility’ of Bauby’s imagination.

In the film, the scene that corresponds with Harwood's, as above, is expanded to illustrate the scope of Jean-Do's imagination. Through voiceover, Jean-Do announces: "other than my eye, there are two things that aren't paralysed. My imagination and my memory. They're the only two ways I can escape from my diving bell. I can imagine anything, anybody, anywhere" (39:30). As he speaks, layered, superimposed close-up images of butterflies on flowers fade into wide, sweeping aerial shots of coastal cliffs, snow-capped mountains and Martinique Island, before cutting to a point-of-view shot of Jean-Do's girlfriend Inès (Agathe de la Fontaine), semi-naked and returning the camera's gaze provocatively (40:42). After the cut, Jean-Do and Inès roll on the beach in a passionate embrace, shown from multiple, mid-close angles. In the voiceover, Jean-Do then signals the shift from imagination to memory: "Now I'll remember myself as I was. Handsome, debonair, glamorous" (41:19), but the photographic images on screen are of Marlon Brando, prompting Jean-Do's assertions "That's Marlon Brando, not me!". The rapid jump-cut reveals an aerial shot of a male skier, dressed in orange, descending a pristine slope, over which Jean-Do states "That's me" (41:29). The imagined 'showreel' concludes with a home-video style vignette of an apres-ski gathering that freezes on a smiling Jean-Do, with a passport photo inserted on the left, offering a comparative perspective. A montage of snapshots of Jean-Do (Amalric) in various poses, with different people, across the stages of his life fills the screen, before the jump-cut reveals Jean-Do as he is in the diegetic present, seated in his wheelchair, inert, in a hat and glasses with his right eye taped closed. The imagined introspection, lasting approximately two and a half minutes, demonstrates the narrative and cognitive freedom that imagination grants Jean-Do, reflecting Bauby's incorrigible autobiographical narrative. Schmitt claims "autobiography has a major drawback: It is claustrophobically anchored in the autobiographer's mind" (2017: p. 144); however, as Schnabel claims in an interview, "reality" in the film, as it is in Bauby's memoir, "is whatever is going on in [Jean-Dominique Bauby's] head" as "his brain became his [...] landscape" (in Movieweb, 2010: 4:47-5:06). It is precisely Bauby's mind, in his capacity as a vulnerable subject, that mobilises his autobiographical subjectivity: the 'butterfly' of his imagination liberates his testimony from the 'diving bell' of his diminished body. By observing literary autobiography's proclivity for imaginative interiority and replicating the autodiegetic point of view of Bauby's embodied self-witness, the auteurial équipe have the capacity to address multiple dimensions of Jean-Dominique Bauby's subjectivity simultaneously, adhering to the epistemic reality of Bauby's imagination within the testimonial scope of pactual integrity.

In their collective role as secondary witness, the auteurial équipe are charged with the preservation of Bauby's autobiographical invitation, whilst they are paradoxically liberated

by his narrative's characteristic incorrigibility. Schnabel exercises the freedom afforded by Bauby's cerebral narrative to stretch the "subjective perimeter" (Schmitt, 2017: p. 67) of the literary source text, using the flexibility of Jean-Do's imagination and the cinematic medium to redeploy his own artistic visions within the testimonial film.²⁵ The falling glaciers (37:15) as emblematic of physical deterioration, and the stylised shot of Josephine's flickering hair during the journey to Lourdes in the convertible (108:30) are both examples of Schnabel's artistic intervention that do not feature in either the screenplay or the memoir. However, these images do not conflict with the tone and intimacy of Bauby's testimonial narrative, functioning as cinematic "emotion markers" (Smith, 1999: p. 118) that support sustained empathic engagement rather than drive it, as complementary rather than contradictory contributions that demonstrate the latitude of Jean-Do's memory and consciousness. Schmitt recognises the potentially limited, partial perspective afforded readers of literary autobiography, stating:

We often refer to "the truth of the person", the fact of having access to this truth meaning knowing the person more or better than someone else. [...] [W]e should not talk about truth but about the scope of the person, the subjective perimeter we have access to. In a text, this perimeter is limited for obvious reasons

(Schmitt, 2017: p. 67)

But, the audiovisual remit of cinema and the necessarily interpretive aspect of adaptation expand upon the limited representational capacity of literary autobiography. Schnabel's auteurist flourishes align with Schmitt's idea of scope, as representative of Bauby's unbounded intellect depicted in contrast with the finitude of his physical condition. This critical tension, which underlies Bauby's testimonial account, coupled with the notion of auteurbiography as secondary witnessing, nullifies any threat to factual integrity, as Schnabel's actions do not deviate from the first-person rhetoric of cinematic I-witnessing.

²⁵ Schnabel wrote a screenplay for Patrick Süskind's novel *Perfume* and saw parallels between the protagonist, Jean-Baptiste Grenouille and Bauby; the screenplay was rejected, and the film was eventually realised with Tom Tykwer as co-writer and director, but Schnabel reused some of his original ideas in *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*.



Figure 3.2: *Jean-Dominique Bauby at Berck-sur-Mer in Assigné à Résidence* (Beineix, 1997).

In addition to point of view oriented cinematic devices, Schnabel embeds additional referential and intertextual anchors in support of the veracity of the adapted cinematic narrative. Through his preparatory research, Schnabel flew to France and found that staff at the Berck-sur-Mer hospital who had cared for Bauby were able to describe the physicality of his condition, right down to the placement of his hands to assist with Amalric's reenactment (Schnabel in 'Behind the Camera', 2013: 18:40-19:56). The need for realistic characterisation is key to the auteurbiographical commitment to secondary witnessing. Accordingly, Schnabel's extratextual, biographical research efforts were buttressed by Jean-Jacque Beineix's documentary *Assigné à Résidence* (1997), which contains actual footage of Jean-Dominique Bauby in his Locked-In state in an established testimonial medium (See Figure 3.2). The documentary project observes Bauby working with his therapist, and shows the reality of his day-to-day life at Berck-sur-Mer whilst writing the memoir. The inevitable intertextual links between the documentary and the film are most pertinent in Amalric's "salvaged" (Hutcheon, 2013) portrayal of the body, visually replicating the physicality of Jean-Dominique Bauby's embodied experience of Locked-In Syndrome, as seen in the comparison between Figure 3.2, and the still from Schnabel's film in Figure 3.3. Mathieu Amalric claims that the role of Jean-Do "was a very physical part" ('Submerged', 2008: 8:18), explaining the concerted effort required to embody a person with Locked-In syndrome: "I prepared myself like a sportsman [...] not to move when you can move demands all the muscles, because you have to tense all the muscles not to move" ('Submerged', 2008: 8:20). Amalric, when interviewed, acknowledged the importance of his own extratextual research process, citing the Beineix film as a referential source and further claiming "those 26 minutes helped me a lot, because you

see him [Bauby]" (Amalric in Movieweb, 2010: 1:20-23). Amalric also confirms that those who knew Bauby were his "mirror", feeding back on the precision of his physical reenactment of Bauby's material body (2:50-3:08), as witnesses helping him to be "believable" (2:45). The accuracy of Amalric's incarnation as a biographical and testimonial act, visually validates the witnessing agenda of the film narrative by providing the body as the referent "site" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 37) that can "make embodiment visible" (Smith and Watson. 2010: p. 75) for the viewer as witness.



Figure 3.3: *Mathieu Amalric as Jean-Do in The Diving Bell and the Butterfly (Schnabel, 2007).*

In addition to the authentic reenactment of the bodily 'site', location is also integral to the cinematic adaptation of *The Diving Bell* as Bauby's environment at the time of writing was intrinsic to his experience as the material context for the narrative. Accordingly, Schnabel as director felt it important to situate the cinematic adaptation of Bauby's narrative in the same setting, claiming that anything otherwise would have been "fake" (PathéUk, 2007: 5:18). In spite of the typically cautious disclaimer of 'based on a true story' that adorns the DVD cover, Schnabel's commitment to fidelity, to the reality of Bauby's experience, is such that he shot the film on location at the hospital in Berck-sur-Mer where Bauby was treated. Bauby's narrative descriptions of his surroundings are authentically transposed as a result, and in many of the external establishing shots in the film, Bauby's 'Cinecittà' is reimagined:

Cinecittà is the perpetually deserted terrace of Sorrel ward. Facing south, its vast balconies open onto a landscape heavy with the poetic and

slightly offbeat charm of a movie set. The suburbs of Berck look like a model train layout. A handful of buildings at the foot of the sand-dunes give the illusion of a Western ghost town. As for the sea, it foams such an incandescent white that it might be the product of the special-effects department.

(p. 37)

As Bauby's narrative is contingent upon his embodied perspective, his environment and its landscape are prevalent in his introspective reflections: the Berck-sur-Mer hospital is the sea to his diving bell. In *What We See When We Read* (2014), Peter Mendelsund asserts that "much of our reading imagination comprises visual free association [...] untethered from the author's text" (p. 294) meaning that "what we *do not* see is what the author pictured when writing a particular book" (original italics, p. 207). However, by filming the cinematic text in the exact setting Bauby refers to in his memoir, Schnabel embeds the same images Bauby saw as autobiographical artefacts, just as they were described from Bauby's perspective. If heterophenomenological engagement with autobiography is "*the capacity of putting yourself in somebody else's place*" (original italics, Schmitt, 2017: p. 74), then Schnabel's faithful cinematic transposition of Bauby's environment incites this heterophenomenological faculty by virtue of his carefully replicated surroundings, which function as a watermark of factual integrity throughout the adaptation.

In/Fidelity: Empathy and Ethics

As established, adapting autobiographical accounts of embodied experience requires a sensitive and ethical approach that can privilege the reality of vulnerable subjectivity, without inviting overdetermined empathic relation. However, autobiographies also contain partial representations of relational others with whom the subject lives, works, and interacts, specifically those who provide significant context for their experiential narrative. The research required as part of the adaptive auteurbiographical process recognises that as "life is experienced socially [...] narrating one's life necessitates narrating the lives of others" (Lee, 2014: p. 1256), and the auteurial équipe engage the subject's related others to expand the autobiographical scope of the cinematic narrative (as evinced above), but also to ensure that those represented are afforded the appropriate referential respect. As Jean-Dominique Bauby's relationships were an integral part of his life, and his literary testimony, those same relationships become important within the testimonial context of the adapted film as secondary testimony. Paul John Eakin attests:

growing acceptance of a relational model of identity is conditioning us to accept an increasingly large component of 'we' -experience in the 'I' - narratives we associate with autobiography.

(1999: pp. 74-75)

It is inevitable that each self-referential narrative will carry the residue of identity's relational model as the subject is constructed socially (Schmitt, 2017: p. 11). Ultimately, the auteurial équipe have a referential responsibility to the related others represented in the source narrative in addition to the autobiographical subject, as they too are real people who exist in the real world. This aspect of auteurbiography is developed further in the following chapter's discussion of auto/biography; however, the testimonial context of vulnerable subjectivity invites a particularly nuanced evaluation of subjective focus and referential responsibility.

For Couser, referential responsibility in life-writing equates to "respect for autonomy", which extends to offering "some degree of control over what happens to [others'] stories, including secrets and private information" (2004: p. 19). However, the degree of control is further determined by the kinds of relationships in which the writer and related others are engaged: "The ethical stakes are proportionate to the centrality (and vulnerability) of the figure involved and the intimacy and interdependence between the writer and the subject" (2004: p. 19). Couser's claim concerns the ethics of explicitly relational life-writing, but can be extended to accommodate the politics of auteurbiographical adaptations, as testimonial and ethical acts of representation, and the self-witnessing testimonies of vulnerable subjects who represent others within their testimonial narratives.

Bauby's loss of agency permeates his experience throughout the memoir as he strives to reconcile his newly vulnerable subjectivity with his former identity through distinctly nostalgic and relational episodes. In 'The Photo' chapter, Bauby catalogues a memory of shaving his father on the last occasion that they met prior to Bauby suffering his stroke, in a retrospective reflection typical of the quest narrative (Frank, 2013: p. 119). Bauby goes to great lengths to describe the elder man and his surroundings in a sentimental and almost tangible apprehension of the paternal encounter:

The scene has remained engraved in my memory. Hunched in the red-upholstered armchair where he sifts through the day's newspapers, my dad bravely endures the rasp of the razor attacking his loose skin. I wrap

a big towel around his shrivelled neck, daub thick lather over his face, and do my best not to irritate his skin, dotted here and there with small dilated capillaries. From age and fatigue, his eyes have sunk deep into their sockets and his nose looks too prominent for his emaciated features. But, still flaunting the plume of hair – now snow white – that has always crowned his tall frame, he has lost none of his splendour. All around us, a lifetime's clutter has accumulated; [...] a confusion of ancient magazines, records no longer played, miscellaneous objects. Photos from all the ages of man have been stuck into the frame of a large mirror.

(pp. 51-2)

The lyrical description of this scene is visually rich, littered with precise observations of colour and texture that summon not only images, but also the materiality/material precarity of the man and his environment in a phenomenological rendering of nostalgic and relational empathy. This cinematic description is carried through to the filmic adaptation in detail (see Figure 3.4) , right down to John-Do's (Mathieu Amalric) use of a live blade for the shave to ensure that appropriate levels of care and bodily tension were achieved, with the authentic sound of steel scraping stubbly skin a particularly resonant phenomenological prompt. Bauby's descriptions of his father – affectionately referred to as Papinou in the film – are fastidiously realised in Max von Sydow's cinematic performance, from the aesthetic to the characterisation. Von Sydow himself said "it was not difficult to do this character. It was all in the text" (von Sydow in 'Submerged', 2008: 7:00-7:05), and the chemistry between von Sydow and Amalric is authentically fraternal on screen.



Figure 3.4: *Jean-Do shaves Papinou.*

The film provides one significant and unambiguous addendum: the addition of a contemporary photograph of Jean-Do,²⁶ which appears in a close shot alongside the elder man's reflection in the mirror (55:01). This Lacanian moment carries with it a critical tension, which foreshadows an evaluation that Papinou makes in a later scene that cinematically reappropriates Bauby's assessment of the simultaneity of his and his father's plights. In the memoir, Bauby observes:

I cannot quit my seaside confinement. And he [Papinou] can no longer descend the magnificent staircase of his apartment building on his ninety-two-year-old legs. We are both locked-in cases, each in his own way: my self in my carcass, my father in his fourth-floor apartment.

(pp. 52-3)

Though the embodied experience of Locked-In Syndrome is beyond the comprehension for the majority of Bauby's readers, a cultural assumption regarding the often physical limitations of age allows the simile to foster empathic proximity, which is further buttressed by the relational empathic "channel" (Anderst, 2015) of the tender filial relationship. Anderst explains that autobiographical narratives can make use of intra-textual empathic "tracks" between the subject and the related others represented in their texts to incite and encourage the empathic engagement of their readers. Bauby's assertion of empathy for his elderly and isolated father is mobilised by the observation of their similarity, which invites the reader to share in his empathic connection and invest in the validity of his evaluation of their equivalency. However, as Schmitt asserts "when the experience narrated is so fundamentally different from anything you have experienced in your own life, your empathy towards the autobiographer is more an act of good will than a serious form of re-enactment" (Schmitt, 2017: p. 110). Evidently, the assertion of similarity between a debilitating neurological disorder and the limitations of an ageing body is a simplistic and metaphorical comparison in the memoir. But, Bauby's very personal evaluation of his and his father's immobility and consequent isolation as equivalent cultivates empathic proximity, by making the otherwise unrelatable, embodied experience of Locked-In Syndrome comprehensible rather than accessible. By drawing on the familiar physical limitations of ageing, Bauby articulates his experience in knowable terms, whilst his autobiographical invitation simultaneously entreats empathy from the reader/viewer that is analogous to his feeling with his father in comparable conditions.

²⁶ The memoir references a photograph of Bauby as a child on a visit to Berck as opposed to an image of him as an adult, which his father later sends to him whilst he is in hospital there.

Bauby's kinship with his father is particularly poignant on screen as the film reiterates John-Do and Papinou's equivalence with both sensitivity and pathos. Bauby's written reflection, as detailed above, becomes Papinou's distraught observation on screen, whereby Papinou paraphrases Bauby's literary realisation of their similitude during an emotional telephone call between the two men:

I've had a thought about us. We're in the same boat. I'm stuck in this apartment, unable to use the stairs. You try four flights of stairs when you're 92! You see, we're both locked-in. You in your body, me in my apartment.

(1:18:35-59)

The conversation is constructed using details from 'The Photo' chapter's aforementioned introspection, but Bauby's words become Papinou's in the cinematic interchange. However, the reciprocity of the empathic channel between the two men mitigates the infidelity of the reattributed dialogue, supported by an emotionally-charged shot-reverse-shot dynamic that closely frames the facial affect of both men (1:17:26-1:18:30). This mirrored "scene of empathy" (Plantinga, 1999) is emphatic and complex, intensified by the close shots of Jean-Do as the empathic target within the testimonial discourse, and Papinou's tearful resignation, driven home by Jean-Do's amanuensis Claude's (Anne Consigny) empathic tears as she both expedites and bears witness to the encounter. In the memoir, the chapter culminates with Bauby considering how difficult his condition and the resultant separation from his father must be for the elder man, assigning his own pain to his father as reflected in this passage:

Every now and then he calls, and I listen to his affectionate voice, which quivers a little in the receiver they hold to my ear. It cannot be easy for him to speak to a son who, as he well knows, will never reply.

(p. 53)

In the film, the telephone conversation is depicted using Bauby's reflective intuitions in the memoir as a blueprint: Papinou communicates with Jean-Do, with Claude acting as Jean-Do's interpreter; Papinou expresses his frustrations in the same ways that Bauby identifies them in the memoir, but Bauby's voice – as the referential anchor of embodied subjectivity – is conspicuous by its absence. The unavoidable delays caused by Jean-Do's dictated communication via Claude exacerbate Papinou's confusion – represented as symptomatic of his age in the film, though he is represented as lucid in the memoir – causing him to lose his train of thought and exclaim "It's impossible to talk like this"

(1:18:13). The sensation of physical and emotional distance is more acute as a consequence of the parallel depiction of communicative difficulties for each of the men, which also reinscribes Bauby's own frustrations in the memoir, echoing his sense of bereavement when unable to play and joke with his own son (pp. 78-79). When Jean-Do implores his father not to cry, Papinou replies "that's easy for you to say. You're my son, for God's sake!" (1:19:39), the irony of his words resonating in the emotional tenor of the exchange. The autobiographical invitation to empathic relation functions at both an intra-textual and an extra-textual level in this scene, as Papinou expresses the relational empathy described by Bauby in the source text, whilst simultaneously triggering the audience to feel with Jean-Do and Papinou as their shared affect is physically rendered. The empathic relation Bauby's memoir elicits endures the adaptive process in spite of the slight shift of perspective from the narrating 'I' to the character Papinou, as they remain projected in parallel in the film, as they are in the memoir. This correspondence is essential for the preservation of subjective truth at the heart of self-witness, and the transmedial interpretation retains the empathic dynamic between father and son as an adaptive gesture of factual integrity.

Retaining the relational empathy demonstrated in an autobiographical narrative of self-witness is particularly pertinent in cases where the vulnerable subject is unable to approve or verify the details to be adapted. In auteurbiographical adaptations, the consequences of creative deviation can be detrimental to an adapted text's factual integrity, but also, have ethical implications. However, Harwood admits that the scene he is "proudest of" is one of his own invention (Harwood in Movieweb, 2010: 2:26-2:23), with no corresponding moment referred to in Bauby's original memoir. The scene in question is a short episode that depicts the mother of Bauby's children, Sylvie, at Jean-Do's bedside, whereby she agrees to interpret for Jean-Do when his lover calls his room in the absence of his therapist. The screenplay does not name Jean-Do's lover, identifying her only as "A Woman's Voice" and then "The Woman's Voice", with Sylvie informing Jean-Do simply "it's her". Sylvie and Jean-Do's unnamed lover are involved in a terse exchange that foregrounds Sylvie's emotional pain and sense of betrayal, before Sylvie selflessly agrees to leave the room to allow the caller to address Jean-Do directly; in the screenplay Harwood writes that Sylvie "may or may not be listening". Sylvie re-enters the room when the caller mentions her regret that she and Jean-Do did not have a child together, but the call concludes with Sylvie's supposedly intuitive intervention: "he does want to say something. He wants to say, 'I love you', but he doesn't want to say it in front of me" (pp. 104-8). Harwood's scene is undeniably affecting, as the innate tension and discomfiture of the exchange is underpinned by his conception of a love triangle between a man, his

former partner, and the woman he left her for. Nevertheless, Harwood overlooks his auteurbiographical obligation to preserve Jean-Do's narrative of self-witness, and there is a palpable shift in focus that temporarily displaces him as the empathic target, instead foregrounding Sylvie's emotional conflict.

This scene is indicative of Harwood's external creative input, as informed by the research he undertook in preparation for the adaptation, rather than being conversant with the source text. It is likely that Harwood's limited contextual research affected the invention of the telephone scene, as Harwood explained in an interview that he spoke only to the mother of Bauby's children and one of his physiotherapists prior to writing the screenplay. Harwood also admits that he is "a little nervous of talking to real people" when writing an adapted screenplay, as he finds it creatively inhibiting, further claiming he "wanted to be able to invent and not be too bound" (in Movieweb, 2010: 3:01-3:23) by other people's input. However, Sylvie de la Rochefoucauld claims:

Ron Harwood asked me lots of personal questions. It really was like a torture session at times, but I had to go through with it. There were many things I'd never addressed since Jean-Do's death, not even with my children. Ron brought them all out. He was brilliant. He wanted to know everything. I ended up being completely honest. Honesty is the goal of a great film, even though it is hard at times.

(de la Rochefoucauld in Allen, 2008)

The honesty to which de la Rochefoucauld refers is her own, partial truth, which may account for the way Harwood foregrounds her distress in the screenplay scene described above. Harwood's limited research efforts, and the consequent expression of empathy with Sylvie in his invented scene, jeopardises the testimonial endeavour of auteurbiography, creating a brief disruption to the autobiographical invitation at the adaptive discourse level of the screenplay by skewing the referential focus from Bauby's experiential truth to Sylvie's.

For auteurbiography to maintain the ethical and empathic agenda of secondary witnessing, the cinematic adaptation must remain focused on the autobiographical subject as self-witness and empathic target. Although Harwood's tonally deviant, triangulated telephone scene, described above, was retained in the cinematic adaptation, Schnabel made some subtle amendments using his own extensive research process to inform the changes. Unlike Harwood, Schnabel engaged in a substantial and ongoing investigative exercise that involved talking with Bauby's closest friends throughout production, oscillating between the memoir and its testimonial and relational context. Bauby's memoir

makes it clear that his lover, Florence Ben Sadoun was a loyal companion, and someone with whom he was in regular communication: “Sweet Florence refuses to speak to me unless I first breathe noisily into the receiver that Sandrine holds glued to my ear” (p. 49). In the film, Schnabel abridges and reinterprets Harwood’s telephone conversation, and gives Ben Sadoun’s cinematic counterpart the name Inès (Agathe de la Fontaine), who is also included in Jean-Do’s imagined memory montage earlier in the film (described earlier). Schnabel also condenses Sylvie’s input to diminish the shift in empathic focus, renaming her Céline (Emmanuelle Seigner). Though Inès is still characterised as afraid to visit Jean-Do, and the tension of Céline’s presence during the exchange remains, Schnabel goes some way towards redressing both the testimonial empathic focus and the scarcity of Ben Sadoun’s representation in the film. Firstly, Céline’s dialogue is less hostile, and she quickly places Inès on speakerphone so that Jean-Do can hear her voice. Schnabel includes the phrase “each day I wait” (1:28:41) in the dictated dialogue – relayed by Céline – between Jean-Do and Inès, as a direct confirmation of Jean-Do’s feelings for Inès, and a coded acknowledgement of Ben Sadoun’s relationship with Bauby based on information provided during preparatory interviews (‘Submerged’, 2008). The reciprocal affection between Inès and Jean-Do is apparent, and this phrase not only pulls empathic focus back to Jean-Do and the heartache of separation inflicted by his condition through a literal reassertion of the ‘I’, it also signifies and reinstates the primacy of the autobiographer’s experience, whilst respecting the subject’s relational context as inextricable from autobiographical narratives. This act of auteurial authority mitigates Harwood’s deviation in the screenplay, to reaffirm the film’s testimonial commitment, and to underscore the primacy of factual integrity in auteurbiographical adaptations as a form of secondary witnessing.

The impact of de la Rochefoucauld’s input manifests in other ways throughout both the screenplay and the film, most pertinent in the ubiquity of her onscreen counterpart, Céline (Emmanuelle Seigner), who appears prominently in promotional material and on the DVD cover, and the relative absence of Inès, as representative of Bauby’s lover Florence Ben Sadoun. In a published interview, de la Rochefoucauld was reported as saying: “I was at [Bauby’s] bedside day after day. I never abandoned him. I was never aware of Jean-Do’s girlfriend visiting him in hospital” (in Allen, 2008).²⁷ Contrary to de la Rochefoucauld’s claim, she herself is mentioned only fleetingly in one chapter of Bauby’s memoir, ‘Through a Glass, Darkly’ (p. 77), which depicts a Father’s Day visit from his children and where he refers to Sylvie by name only twice (p. 82), leaving their shared parental responsibilities

²⁷ Beth Arnold’s article, ‘The truth about “The Diving Bell and the Butterfly”’ (2008) for Salon.com states that de la Rochefoucauld denies having said this.

implicit. The record of interaction between Bauby and de la Rochefoucauld is limited to: “Sylvie and I remain alone and silent, her hand squeezing my inert fingers. Behind dark glasses that reflect a flawless sky, she softly weeps over our shattered lives (p. 82)”. Here, Bauby refers to their individually ‘shattered lives’ as plural, rather than a collective shattered life, marking them as separate, albeit inevitably connected by their past and their children. By contrast, Bauby’s references to Ben Sadoun in the memoir are indicative of her regular and protective presence. He describes her as a “[member] of the personal bodyguard that sprang up immediately after the disaster” (p. 120) and includes her in his remembered account of the day of his stroke (p. 127). De la Rochefoucauld’s presence as Céline in numerous scenes in the film serves to further highlight Florence Ben Sadoun’s effacement, and raises further questions as to the ethical implications of de la Rochefoucauld’s involvement in the adaptive process and the potential impact on the broader witnessing agenda.

The relational context of an autobiographical subject’s testimonial narrative can act as a scaffold for their subjective truth; however, the textual portrait within the cinematic frame of secondary witnessing must remain that of the autobiographical subject, with the focus on their testimonial truth. The auteurbiographical research process must be conducted within the testimonial agenda of factual integrity, especially when the autobiographical subject is unable to verify the contributory accounts of relational others. In the case of *The Diving Bell’s* adaptation, Bauby was deceased by the time the rights were sold, and control of the memoir passed to his heirs, who were minors at the time of his death. This may explain de la Rochefoucauld’s prevailing influence upon the final film product, as she retained *droit moral* – the moral rights – for Bauby’s memoir on behalf of his children. According to Michel M. Walter, *droit moral* can vary from one legislature to another; however, under Article 6bis of the Berne Convention, “the most important prerogatives of *droit moral* [are] the right of paternity and the right of integrity” (2019: p. 319). Walter explains that paternity is “the right to claim authorship”, whilst integrity “confers on the author the right to object to any changes to his or her work that may harm the author’s reputation” (2019: p. 319). Furthermore, unlike economic rights, *droit moral* cannot be transferred, with French copyright law designating *droit moral* “everlasting, inalienable, and exempt from the statute of limitations” (Walter, 2019: p. 320); this means that under French law, *droit moral* is retained even when the economic rights are sold or transferred. The economic rights were initially sold to Dreamworks, then to Universal, before finally being acquired by Kathleen Kennedy at Pathé who made and released the film. But, journalist Beth Arnold alleges that de la Rochefoucauld, who was initially involved in the sale of the economic rights for the memoir’s adaptation, brought a lawsuit against the

publishers prior to production, asserting control of *droit moral* and arguing for increased royalties, all on behalf of her children (Arnold, 2008). De la Rochefoucauld won the lawsuit, and became friends with Kathleen Kennedy, whom she considers “the godmother” of the adapted film (de la Rochefoucauld in Arnold, 2008). De la Rochefoucauld’s actions, coupled with the film’s apparent deviations from Bauby’s source memoir, suggest that her involvement in the adaptation process was self-motivated, rather than supportive of the auteurbiographical, testimonial agenda. The evidence of de la Rochefoucauld’s input is particularly problematic in the context of vulnerable subjectivity, as it compromises the testimonial project of auteurbiography and risks the referential reality of the subjective truth.

The creative and interpretive aspects of auteurbiographical adaptation inevitably leave traces of the auteurial équipe’s input on the finished product as they undertake the crossmodal transposition of a testimonial source text into a new intersubjective form. Bearing witness to self-witnessing requires an ethical and empathic commitment to the experiential truth of the autobiographical subject, along with the will and the wherewithal to transmit their testimonial invitation. Harwood’s realisation of point of view is the masterstroke that underpins *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*’s factual integrity, as the vehicle for the multidimensional representation of Bauby’s embodied experience; however, Harwood’s metatextual research was minimal, and the consequent deviations compromise the auteurbiographical subjective focus of secondary testimony, jeopardising the testimonial project’s commitment to the transmission of the autobiographical invitation. Nevertheless, it is Julian Schnabel who claims both the ultimate responsibility and the overall recognition for the cinematic rendering of Bauby’s narrative of self-witness. In spite of minor departures from the source, such as the casting of three children instead of two to play Bauby’s offspring (a decision sanctioned by de la Rochefoucauld), and the changing of a few names with no real impact, Schnabel largely maintained the tone of Bauby’s memoir throughout, steering the narrative – and the viewer – “*back to life*” (original italics, Schmitt, 2017: p. 117) through cognisant, empathic and testimonial resolutions.

Schnabel’s artistic and creative additions to the film are complimentary, and mindful of the tone, embodiment and relational context of the reality of the vulnerable subject. For example, Schnabel includes found anatomical images as the backdrop for the film’s opening titles, all of which were salvaged from a house located close to the Berck hospital where Bauby was treated, which was formerly owned by a doctor who worked there. The

song in Jean-Do's head as he awakens from his coma is a drinking song performed by one of Bauby's closest friends and recorded in a hallway to give the sound a contained quality. Furthermore, the first person that Jean-Do, and the viewer, sees in the film is one of the nurses who actually tended Bauby, and the physiotherapist who cradles Jean-Do in the pool scene (1:14:00) was Bauby's physiotherapist during his time at Berck-sur-Mer (Schnabel in 'Behind the Camera', 2013: 19:40-19:56). Schnabel insisted that the film be shot entirely in French, on location at the same hospital, to ensure that the French sensibility and setting of the narrative and its subject was honoured. Schnabel extends the notion of pactual integrity, going to great lengths to endow the cinematic adaptation with auxiliary layers of authentic representation to provide a multisensory, and "multilaminated" (Hutcheon, 2013: p. 21) testimony on behalf of the late Jean-Dominique Bauby.

As with literary autobiographies, and the autofilmic testimonies explored in Section One, auteurbiographical adaptations are fundamentally concerned with the autobiographical truth of a life; this truth is subjective, embodied, and characterised by individual experience, all of which is reflected in the manner and means of testimonial telling. Schmitt reasons: "If you suspect the author of tampering from time to time with the facts, but you feel that this tampering remains reasonable, the autobiographical pact remains valid" (2017: p. 67); this rationale extends to the auteurbiographical labour of cinematic secondary witnessing. The caveat of the *auteurbiographical pact* is that artistic license is permitted, and sometimes necessary, provided the empathic target is explicitly represented, the tone and intimacy of the source text are ethically preserved, and the autobiographical invitation transcends the auteurial impulse for creativity and invention. The overriding occupation and shared ambition of the auteurial équipe is to achieve pactual integrity, to perpetuate empathic engagement, and to ensure that the subject's testimonial imperative endures.

4. Adapting Auto/Biography: Approaching the Limits of Auteurbiography in *Being Flynn* and *Julie & Julia*

Previous chapters have advanced the prospect of a single autobiographical subject as self-witness, with whom the viewer is invited to engage within the testimonial witnessing structure of Contemporary Cinematic I-Witnessing. Chapter Three introduced the concept of auteurbiography, in which literary autobiography is adapted to produce a faithful and ethical secondary testimony by cinematic means. To do this, the auteurial équipe must first bear witness to autobiographical experience through an emersive reading of the text and the context, before transposing and perpetuating the autobiographical invitation for the viewer through the film adaptation. Auteurbiography privileges the autobiographical subject's experience as real, representing, and re-presenting the subjective truth of a life. However, as becomes clear in each of the preceding chapters, the notion of selfhood is constructed discursively within a "social frame" (Schmitt, 2017: p. 11), which manifests as a result of the intersubjective relationships that shape experience and identity. Though autobiographical writing is inevitably partial, cinematic discourse enables a broader perception of the communities, both real and imagined, in which stories of the self are fashioned, and by which the notion of relationality in life writing is reproduced. For those who undertake autobiographical acts, the specificity of experience often encompasses the stories of significant and/or proximate others, which permeate the narrative, indicative of the relational propensity of self-reflection and self-understanding as 'auto/biographical'. Accordingly, this chapter explores the ways in which the relational structure of literary auto/biography can be adapted, addressing the complexities of narrative authority and representation, and the ways in which relationality is configured and conveyed within the testimonial context. The analysis considers the resilience of the autobiographical invitation as a testimonial plea for a willing witness, and the referential responsibility of adapting self-witness that incorporates the biography of a related other.

In addition, this chapter expands the scope of cinematic I-witnessing to evaluate cinematic adaptations of auto/biographical source texts within a mainstream – Hollywood and commercial – context, reflecting further on concepts of narrative authority and the role of the auteur within the testimonial agenda of auteurbiography. Using *Being Flynn* (Weitz, 2012) and *Julie & Julia* (Ephron, 2009), I critique notions of film authorship and ownership to highlight the potential implications of multiple 'signatures' in auteurbiographical adaptations of relational, auto/biographical narratives. By considering the hierarchies of

authorship and representation, I interrogate the ethical and empathic transmission of the autobiographical invitation and its inherent – and imperative – claim to subjective truth. Ultimately, this chapter tests and reveals the limits of auteurbiography, to demonstrate the inevitable limits of cinematic I-witnessing and films' capacity to instantiate the testimonial witnessing structure as an ethical, empathic and testimonial mode.

Nick Flynn's memoir, *Another Bullshit Night in Suck City* (2004) (hereafter *Suck City*) documents his work in a homeless shelter alongside his struggles with drug and alcohol addictions, with reference to the impact of his mother's suicide and his father's absence throughout his formative years. In the cinematic adaptation of Flynn's memoir, entitled *Being Flynn* (2012), screenwriter-director, Paul Weitz remediates the parallel conversion narrative of Flynn and his father, Jonathan, with a subtext of heredity that holds the filial relationship as both an unbreakable bond and an unshakeable responsibility that shapes the life narratives of both men. *Being Flynn* focuses on the relationship that develops between Nick Flynn and his long-estranged father as the circumstance of the elder man's homelessness serendipitously brings them together.

Paul Weitz spent seven years developing the screenplay, with his original draft altered multiple times and reportedly passed over by two studios before going into production with Focus (Flynn, 2013: p. 81). Focus greenlit the version that ultimately became *Being Flynn*, which closely resembles Weitz's original draft, a text that made Nick Flynn "weep" when he read it (Flynn, 2013: p. 81). Weitz has extensive, previous experience with cinematic adaptations. He co-wrote and co-directed *About a Boy* (2002), which was based on Nick Hornby's coming-of-age novel of the same name (1998), and for which he received an Oscar nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay. Weitz also contributed to the Amazon series *Mozart in the Jungle* (2014-2018), adapted from Blair Tindall's 2005 memoir. His forthcoming film *Fatherhood* (2020) is another memoir-to-film adaptation based on Matthew Logelin's *Two Kisses for Maddy: A Memoir of Loss and Love* (2011). Weitz's other notable works include *In Good Company*, (2004), which he wrote, directed and co-produced, and the screenplay for *Little Fockers* (2010), both of which depict complex masculine and paternal relationships. Weitz's body of work demonstrates a particular proclivity for relational and autobiographical narratives, and he states that the "central question" in *Being Flynn* is "how much am I my parent?" (in 'Manny the Movie Guy', 2012: 1:25), which he claims is a reflection on his own relationship with his father.

Julie Powell's memoir *Julie and Julia: 365 Days, 524 Recipes, 1 Tiny Apartment Kitchen: How One Girl Risked Her Marriage, Her Job and Her Sanity to Master the Art of Living*²⁸ (2005) is the literary adaptation of a year-long blog project undertaken between 2002-3, whereby she cooked her way through Julia Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* (Child, Bertholle and Beck, 1961) as a diversion from the anxieties of ageing and existential discontent. In the memoir, Powell posits biographical insights into Julia Child's time spent in France whilst writing the cookbook around which Powell's project was built, in homage to the celebrity chef's influence upon her combined culinary and literary endeavour. The late Nora Ephron wrote and directed the cinematic adaptation *Julie & Julia* (2009), which presents a parallel depiction of Powell and Child, and their respective experiments with French cuisine and writing, which take place fifty years and thousands of miles apart. Ephron's adaptation draws on Powell's blog and subsequent memoir, and Child's autobiography *My Life in France* (2006), supplemented by a metacritical engagement with Child's many literary and televisual texts.

Nora Ephron is one of the select few female filmmakers to attain auteurial acclaim in the Hollywood arena, recognised and commended for her cinematic contributions to the contentious 'chick flick'²⁹ genre (*You've Got Mail*, 1998; *Sleepless in Seattle*, 1993; *When Harry Met Sally*, 1989; *Heartburn*, 1986; et al.). Furthermore, Ephron wrote and published widely on issues affecting women, in essays and self-reflexive pieces that reflect her own experience of ageing, relationships, and the filmmaking industry (*The Most of Nora Ephron*, 2013; *I Remember Nothing: And Other Reflections*, 2010; *I Feel Bad About My Neck: And Other Thoughts on Being A Woman*, 2006; *Heartburn*, 1983; *Scribble Scribble: Notes on the Media*, 1978; *Crazy Salad: Some Things About Women*, 1975; *Wallflower at the Orgy*, 1970). The biographical documentary film *Everything Is Copy: Nora Ephron: Scripted and Unscripted* (2016), an ode to Ephron's life and work, won the Audience Prize for Documentary Feature at the Palm Springs International Film Festival, with the Tribeca Film Festival issuing an annual prize in Ephron's name as testament to her status and contribution to cinema. Ephron's enthusiasm for *Julie & Julia*³⁰ was borne of her

²⁸ Subsequent prints retitled Powell's memoir *Julie and Julia: My Year of Cooking Dangerously*.

²⁹ Though it divided critics and scholars alike, the term chick flick gained currency around the time of *Julie & Julia*'s production, primarily as a simplistic descriptor for "commercial films that appeal to women" (Ferris and Young, 2008: p. 2), the type of film for which Ephron is well known.

³⁰ Ephron wanted to write and direct *Julie and Julia* from the start, but originally there was another screenwriter on board, who eventually pulled out (TimesTalks Interview, 2012).

experience with female-led texts and her belief in the overlapping concerns of the real women to be depicted, of which she said:

It's not that Julie Powell and Julia Child are alike, but that their lives followed a kind of deliciously similar pattern. I knew that I had stories that were gonna [sic] kind of interlock with one another.

(‘Secret Ingredients’: 3:44-4:03)

Ephron’s statement is indicative of the relational framework that underpins her adaptive process, and her assertion of the separate subjectivities of the women depicted.

At first glance, the adaptations under scrutiny in this chapter share numerous equivalencies: both films present two subjects of the same sex in a relational model, and each is written and directed by an auteur of the corresponding gender. Furthermore, as each adaptation combines the roles of screenwriter and director within the auteurial équipe, the perceived distance between the discursal levels of screenplay and cinematic production is elided. Both source texts are fundamentally “conversion narratives”, which “[develop] through a linear pattern—descent into darkness, struggle, moment of crisis, conversion to new beliefs and worldview, and consolidation of a new communal identity” (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 91). In addition, each film features an actor who might be considered a ‘Hollywood heavyweight’ in a lead role, with Robert De Niro in *Being Flynn*, and Meryl Streep in *Julie & Julia*, both actors who have enjoyed long and illustrious cinematic careers, with a history of iconic roles. However, in both films studied here, these actors play supporting roles within a relational model, as the secondary, embedded subjects of auto/biographical narratives. As a comparative case study, this chapter illustrates the ways in which the previously identified characteristics of auteurbiography are consistently observed, whilst exploring the impact of gender, genre, casting, and the shared subjective focus of relationality upon pactual integrity and the testimonial rhetoric of cinematic I-witnessing. The comparative approach is a deliberately critical gesture, through which I address the ways in which the autobiographical invitation works in different auto/biographical and testimonial contexts. The analysis illustrates the ways in which cinematic adaptations of self-reflexive and relational narratives of witness can achieve the necessary pactual integrity, but also reveals the limits of auteurbiography as secondary testimony.

Auto/Biography and Relationality

Autobiographical acts are largely accepted as the individual record of a person's unique experience; however, it is also argued that as the notion of selfhood is constructed socially (Schmitt, 2017; Smith and Watson, 2010; Miller, 2002; Eakin, 2008 and 1999; et al.); the relationships in which we engage throughout our lives affect the ways in which we come to understand, and narrate, our selves. Self-reflexive writing inevitably encompasses the stories of others, in a discursive formation that constitutes 'relationality'. Smith and Watson explain:

In life writing, actors may be situated discursively vis-à-vis others who are present explicitly, as is the host to the traveler, or implicitly, as is the warden in a prison [...]. In such narratives, negotiations occur across boundaries – differences of rank, nation, ethnicity, religion, and gender – that are both constructed and redefined in such an encounter. As critics attend to these spaces of the self, their dynamics, and the fluctuating positions actors take up within them, they may assign more specific coordinates to what has often been discussed as “relationality” in life writing. That is, they can explore how a subject's narration of her or his life is implicated in and impinges on the lives of others and may encapsulate their biographies.

(Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 44)

Relational actors, and their explicit and implicit roles in shaping our lives, infiltrate the narrative of the self, and subsequently become “embedded within the context of an autobiographical narrative” (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 86). When an autobiographical narrative foregrounds relationality, it “signals the interrelatedness of autobiographical narrative and biography” as “a mode of the autobiographical that inserts biography/ies within an autobiography” (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 256). Family members, commonly parents and siblings, as well as romantic partners and spouses often figure heavily in self-life writing due to their emotional connections and proximity to the subject. These “significant others” provide context for autobiographical narratives as “those whose stories are deeply implicated in the narrator's and through whom the narrator understands her or his own self-formation” (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 86), as explained in my analysis of *Tarnation* in Chapter One. The stories of these significant others emerge in tandem with the autobiographical subject's own, interlocking with the autobiographical narrative as a consequence of their embeddedness within the author's notion of self, bringing to the fore their ongoing contribution to the autobiographical subject's self-formation.

Historically, relationality in life writing was considered a characteristic of female self-record (Benstock, 1988; Friedman, 1988; Chodorow, 1978; Rowbotham, 1973; et al.). Feminist autobiography scholar, Nancy Chodorow, identifies the “complex relational constellation” (Chodorow, 1978: p. 169) of women’s identity formation, arguing that “feminine personality comes to include a fundamental definition of self in relationship” (Chodorow, 1978: p. 169). In the seminal collection *The Private Self* (1988), edited by Shari Benstock, Susan Stanford Friedman and her contemporaries assert that women’s life writing does not share the “endemically Western” and “individualistic paradigms” (Friedman, 1988: p. 35 and p. 38) of masculine autobiographical acts,³¹ as advanced by Georges Gusdorf, James Olney, et al., positing that “*identification, interdependence, and community* [...] are key elements in the development of a woman’s identity” (original italics, Friedman, 1988: p. 38). However, more recently life-writing scholars have acknowledged the fundamental “relational model of identity” (Eakin, 2008: p. 11), professing the interconnectedness of human experience as inherent in all life writing (Schmitt, 2017; Eakin, 2017, 2008, and 1999; Lee, 2014; Smith and Watson, 2010; Miller, 2007; et al.) with relationality considered “a founding condition of our psychic life, our narrative accounts, and our humanity” (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 217).

Nancy K. Miller confirms that “in autobiography the relational is not optional. Autobiography’s story is about the web of entanglement in which we find ourselves, one that we sometimes choose” (Miller, 2007: p. 544). Miller’s assertion emphasises relationality as ontological and incontrovertible, yet it is possible for the threads of the relational ‘web’ to be manipulated in self-life writing, as Smith and Watson attest: “In some autobiographies a narrator reads his or her “I” as having engaged such figures as models or ideals” (2010: p. 86). These ‘models’ and ‘ideals’ can be people the autobiographer knows and respects, or people the autobiographer does not know personally or directly, but with whom they feel a kinship or similarity, and/or they aspire to be like. Smith and Watson acknowledge that autobiographers may consciously position biographical accounts within their autobiographical narratives, which affords a narrative construction of relationality to reflect the “historical” other’s role as aspirational or influential, in the provision of a “generic [model] of identity” (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 86) for the autobiographical subject. Whether the autobiographical subject constructs a discursive relationship with an unknown other, or simply recites the parallel mapping of shared

³¹ As mentioned with reference to *Arirang* in Chapter One and *The Diving Bell* in Chapter Three.

experience, the narrative proximity of auto/biographical subjects implies a meaningful connection, a sense of relationality, which we, as readers, are invited to ascertain.

The perceived vectors of relationality contribute to the autobiographical subject's contextual configuration of identity within an autobiographical text. Self-reflexive narratives convey "a subject in context (historical, social, geographical)" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 218), offering insight into the unique perspective of "the ideological 'I'" (p. 76). Through the context provided by "[h]istorical and ideological notions of the person" we are afforded "cultural ways of understanding" identity formation, which encompass:

the material location of subjectivity; the relationship of the person to particular others and to a collectivity of others; the nature of time and life course; the importance of social location [and] the motivations for human actions.

(Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 76)

Fundamentally, the relational model of auto/biography incorporates the stories of significant others dialogically within the autobiographical subject's narrative as an outlet for self-articulation against the schema of a collective context. The biography/ies that emerge within autobiographical acts are indicative of the way the subject understands him/herself within a particular historical, ideological, and socio-political prism, which accordingly brings into relief the subject's unique worldview and the parameters for their subjective and testimonial truth. The auto/biographical narratives under scrutiny in this chapter foreground the tension between the traditional, ontological model of relationality and the epistemic engagement of and with the other in the construction of a subjective autobiographical invitation.

Adapting Auto/Biography

As explored in the previous chapter, auteurbiographical adaptations engender a complex ethical obligation, which reframes the adapted film as secondary testimony. The auteur, and by extension, the auteorial équipe, must facilitate the transposition of the experiential reality of the autobiographer, as told, in an ethical and empathic, intertextual engagement with the autobiographical source and its testimonial context. "Referentiality entails responsibility" (Schmitt, 2017: p. 108) according to Arnaud Schmitt, but the adaptation of an auto/biographical source effectively doubles the charge. Auto/biography's relational model complicates the auteurbiographical commitment to factual integrity: not only must the auteorial équipe preserve the autobiographical invitation to instantiate the testimonial witnessing structure, they must also consider their referential responsibility to an

embedded, related other. Auteurbiography presupposes a focal hierarchy, which is particularly important within the testimonial context of cinematic I-witnessing. The representation of the embedded subject should be configured according to their 'role' within the autobiographical subject's narrative, to reflect the ways in which they "explicitly" and/or "implicitly" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 44) contribute to the subject's self-understanding. But, the inherent, ethical duty to depict the embedded other as the representation of a real person can conflict with both the testimonial commitment to subjective truth and the auteurial impulse. Therefore, the ethics of representation must also be considered in relation to the person – or persons – whose story is interwoven within the autobiographical subject's narrative, within the remit of factual integrity. Essentially, the auteur must ensure that the authorial subject is given primacy within the cinematic narrative, whilst also representing the experience of the embedded other with comparable, principled discretion. Consequently, the auteurbiographical adaptation of auto/biography necessitates both subjective emphasis and referential restraint to ensure that the autobiographer's autobiographical invitation, and its inherent testimonial plea for a willing witness, is preserved, whilst the relationality of the narrative is perceptively conveyed.

As well as examining the representational hierarchy of auteurbiographical adaptations, it is necessary to consider the hierarchical operations of authorship and narrative authority throughout the adaptive process. As with *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly* in Chapter Three, auteurial artistic input must also be considered, with questions of film ownership and artistic authority particularly pertinent to the critique of commercial, studio adaptations in the Hollywood arena. Founding theories of auteurism conceive of the director as the author of a film: "The film-maker/author writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen" (Astruc, 1968: p. 17), overlooking the input of the screenwriter within the collaborative, creative process of filmmaking. Assurances of the artistic authority of the auteur gain traction when the roles of screenwriter and director are fulfilled by the same person, as they are in the two films under scrutiny here. However, the perceived authority of the auteur is complicated by the expectations and limitations that the Hollywood context imposes on film production, especially adaptations. In her chapter entitled 'Film Authorship and Adaption', Shelley Cobb (following Bordwell, 1999) explains that "the Hollywood auteur exerts originality, authority, and ownership in spite of an oppressive system that, nevertheless, he remains firmly within, expressing his individuality within the codes of the classical norm" (2012: p. 113). She highlights the potential implications of genre and the associated commercial appeal, and the effects these factors have on an auteur's adaptive production. However, as mentioned in Chapter Three, Western

conceptions of authorship are rooted in notions of individuality and originality, which are complicated by adaptations' necessarily collaborative industry (Cobb, 2012: p. 113). In Hollywood adaptations, then, the auteur must balance the assertion of their own artistic authority with the generic and commercial expectations of the system, along with the necessary acknowledgement of the originary author of their source material. This tension is further exacerbated by the ethical and empathic demands of auteurbiography, and the additional consideration of multiple subjective referents in auto/biography. Contained within these considerations, attention must also be paid to issues of casting and gender, and the ways in which they potentially influence viewer engagement and challenge notions of authorship and ownership. Consequently, this chapter demonstrates the ways in which adapted auto/biographies function within the dialogic cinematic I-witnessing framework by asking: How is 'ownership' of the auto/biographical narrative asserted on screen? How are authorial and referential hierarchies established and preserved? And, do auteurbiographical adaptations delimit the autobiographical invitation?

As seen in Section One, the testimonial scope of a self-witnessing narrative often includes references to a subject's "social frame" (Schmitt, 2017: p. 11), as necessary context for autobiographical experience. Auto/biographical narratives, however, specifically emphasise significant relationships, which means that the broader social frame is narrower, to ensure subjective focus. As a result, auteurbiographical adaptations tend to include only those who contribute to or advance the subject's narrative in meaningful ways. Auteurial decisions relating to the inclusion and exclusion of people and circumstances that contextualise the source memoir can be crucial to the preservation of the testimonial "tone" (Schmitt. 2017), and the ways in which autobiographical acts constitute self-witness: the autobiographer's "willingness to communicate" and "share [their] own subjectivity" (Schmitt, 2017: p. 150) within the context of cinematic I-witnessing. As secondary testimony, the narrative focus of auteurbiography remains the subject's self-narrative act, their autobiographical experience, and the process by which the subject achieves self-understanding through auto/biographical reflections. In the adaptation of auto/biographical narratives, factual integrity means that the film must retain the tone of the subject's testimonial truth, whilst adequately demonstrating the relational dynamic inherent in the source.

Being Flynn: Explicitly Embedded Auto/Biographical Testimony

Autobiographical narratives are characterised by their self-reflexive and communicative mode of address, which manifests, for the reader, as a distinctive, subjective 'voice'. Smith and Watson contend:

we have an impression of a subject's interiority, its intimacy and rhythms of self-reflexivity [...]. Voice as an attribute of the narrating "I," then, is a metaphor for the reader's felt experience of the narrator's personhood, and a marker of the relationship between a narrating "I" and his or her experiential history.

(2010: p. 79)

What Smith and Watson describe is the rhetorical voice that asserts narrative authority, and the reader's perception of the autobiographer as a speaking subject. Furthermore, as explained with reference to autofilmic testimony in Section One, "orally performing an autobiographical act", as Smith and Watson argue, "minimizes the distances between the narrator and the narratee" (2010: p. 97) as the direct articulation of the narrating 'I' that issues the autobiographical invitation. As evinced in earlier chapters, voiceover is the most proficient manner by which to proclaim self-reflexive narrative authority in film, as it constitutes the subject addressing the viewer directly in a recognisably first-person expression of the narrating 'I'. Voiceover permits the narrating "I" to claim narrative primacy within the cinematic frame, whilst also introducing the viewer to their explicit narrative voice as the referential anchor for the embodied subject. Even when they are not present on screen, the voice of the subject encourages the viewer's referential labour, and reminds us of the subjective and retrospective assertion that the narrative makes. Voice mobilises the autobiographical claim to the narrated experience, whilst also framing the experience of others within their self-story. In literary auto/biography:

The voices of literal others may be incorporated through citation of dialogue or the use of free indirect discourse (in which the narrating "I" projects another's subjectivity by imagining his or her interiority of thought and affect). The narrating "I" can embed, for instance, an imagined interiority in the voice of a parent or sibling.

(Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 80)

Graphological and contextual markers can be used to enable the reader to distinguish the narrating 'I' from the embedded voices of others in print; but, in film, the voices of others inevitably emerge as their own, as performed within the cinematic narrative. Consequently, it is the job of the auteur to effectively convey embeddedness and/or citation of a related other's voice, as distinct from the subject's, but also as refracted through the auto/biographical narrative structure.

The opening of *Being Flynn* immediately installs the first-person voiceover convention to establish the subjective perspective of the film narrative, beginning with an introduction to Jonathan Flynn (Robert De Niro). As the scene fades in from black, a male voice asserts: “America has produced only three classic writers, Mark Twain, J. D. Salinger, and me” (0:37); use of the first-person pronoun ‘me’ connects the voiceover with the subject in the cinematic frame to reconcile the narrating ‘I’ of the voiceover with the narrated ‘I’ of the filmic discourse from the outset. In the opening scene, the camera follows Jonathan as he approaches a twenty-four-hour parking garage to prepare for a night shift driving a cab, whilst the voiceover continues: “I am Jonathan Flynn. Everything I write is a masterpiece, and soon, very soon, I shall be known” (0:42). Within the first minute of the film, Jonathan is established as the narrating ‘I’, narrated subject, and protagonist of the film narrative, as the cinematic equivalent of the autobiographical ‘I’, with his narrative authority underscored by the “proper name” (Lejeune, 1989). Jonathan’s self-assured proclamation of authorial greatness is foregrounded as ironic, with the action on screen confirming his unreliability as a narrator as he pours vodka into an orange juice carton before driving the taxi out of the parking garage. But, as soon as it is installed, Jonathan’s narrative authority is quickly subverted, as not only is he missing from the next frame, but his voiceover is usurped by another male voice after the jump cut: “This isn’t his [Jonathan Flynn’s] story. Well it is, but he’s not telling it. I am. I’m Nick Flynn, his son, and I’m sort of trying to be a writer” (01:23-35). Nick’s (Paul Dano) assertion of authorship immediately displaces Jonathan’s narrating ‘I’ and reorients the subjective perspective of the narrative to reclaim narrative authority. Nick’s authorial and narrative primacy is verified by the fact that he is shown handwriting the words spoken in his voiceover; the visual and narrative congruity is indicative of the synchronicity between his autobiographical authorship and his narrative voice as an authoritative, and more credible, declaration of autobiographical subjectivity. As a result, the cinematic narrative is reframed, with Nick as the autobiographical ‘I’ and Jonathan as the embedded relational other of Nick’s auto/biography. Nick’s assertion of the narrating ‘I’, and the diegetic cues that reliably reconcile the narrating ‘I’ with the autobiographical subject, make clear that Jonathan’s narrative is depicted in chorus with Nick’s, but from Nick’s partial and evaluative perspective.

For Nancy Miller, “The challenge that faces autobiographers is to invent themselves despite the weight of their family history, and autobiographical singularity emerges in negotiation with this legacy” (Miller, 2007: p 543); this is the critical tension underlying *Suck City*, which is reflected in the relational structure and narrative strategies in the adapted film. *Being Flynn*’s narrative construction is faithfully transposed from the source

text, in which Nick Flynn affirms that he is the author/narrator of what is described in the book's subtitle as 'a memoir', and that his father's story is articulated through him:

the only book being written about my father (*the greatest writer America has yet produced*), the only book ever written about or by him, as far as I can tell, is the book in your hands. The book that somehow fell to me, the son, to write. My father's uncredited, noncompliant ghostwriter.

(original italics, *Suck City*, p. 322)

In this extract, Flynn acknowledges the responsibility he assumes for including his father's story in his own memoir, foregrounding his father's 'voice' in italics (as above). In addition, Flynn includes a list of citations from the letters he received from his father throughout his life towards the end of the volume, inserted as artefacts that evince the authenticity of Jonathan's voice (p. 298-9). *Suck City* contains both Jonathan Flynn's and Nick Flynn's voices, made distinct at the simplest level by graphology. For Smith and Watson, voice is "distinctive in its emphasis and tone, its rhythms and syntax, its lexicon and affect" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 79); in the memoir, Jonathan's voice is preserved as distinct, whilst it is embedded within Nick Flynn's self-reflexive prose as a 'real', referential anchor. The ways in which Nick Flynn captures his father's voice in the memoir through direct citation are effectively replicated in the film, with Jonathan's voice and its distinguishing features articulated *by him*, whilst it is simultaneously sanctioned and framed by Nick's auto/biographical narrative authority. *Being Flynn* cinematically transposes the proxy dynamic by retroactively reclaiming Jonathan's dialogue as the content of Nick's on-screen autobiographical act, with Jonathan's performative self-aggrandisement characteristic of the real Jonathan Flynn's communiqué as included in the source memoir (p. 320, p. 322, and p. 298). Accordingly, Jonathan's voice in the film is posited as Nick's citation of it, included as embedded, relational context for his own autobiographical exploration of selfhood.

Being Flynn initially assumes an oscillating, parallel structure, whereby the cinematic focus switches between father and son to posit separate, subjective narrative trajectories, but with the Flynn men's similarities suggested by corresponding scenes. The opening scene, mentioned above, articulates the familial link, and informs the viewer that both of the Flynn men write. But, their similarities are advanced as hereditary equivalencies in the subtext; their shared behaviours imply an innate connectedness, in spite of their estrangement. Jonathan engages in a sexual tryst with a female passenger that he has collected in his cab; his use of "buttercup" in place of his companion's name suggests that they are not well acquainted, as does the manner in which the woman enquires about his

photographs, and the way she flees Jonathan's apartment in response to his violent outburst (8:56). In the scenes that immediately follow, Nick's relationship with Denise (Olivia Thirlby) quickly becomes sexual, accelerating from barroom acquaintances to bedfellows in the jump cut (9:26). Pausing their amorous exploits, Denise proclaims "I'm not interested in a relationship", to which Nick replies "Okay, I can cope"; their mutual lack of commitment does not preclude their subsequent consummation of the casual relationship (9:38). Along with the exposure of his infidelity in an earlier scene, Nick's carnal encounter with Denise, when presented in tandem with Jonathan's brief liaison, implies a hereditary link between the Flynn's personalities and behaviour that is depicted as innate. This mirroring perpetuates the relational narrative structure established in the opening scenes and summarises the similarities that Flynn observes in *Suck City*; Nick Flynn's underlying anxieties with regards to becoming like his father are a recurrent theme in his auto/biography, and an important facet of his self-formation through the inclusion of his father's biography. However, the events depicted in the film have no direct referential basis in Flynn's memoir, which renders these scenes an auteurial addition to the film narrative. But, Nick Flynn's involvement in the adaptation process affords the auteurial adjustment a certain level of authenticity, as he approved each of Weitz's many drafts of the screenplay (*Reenactments*, p. 81) prior to production. Furthermore, as the comparable episodes in the film advance one of the core concerns in Flynn's memoir, they serve to buttress the explicit relational structure of the auteurbiographical narrative to further inscribe the testimonial register of the source.

This explicit relational configuration develops when the film's parallel structure is thwarted by a phone call Nick receives from Jonathan, in which the two men communicate for the first time, and symbolically, share their first scene. The film reenacts a telephone call that Flynn describes only briefly in the *Suck City*, first, as reported by Jonathan at the end of the 'Silver Key' chapter (p. 193), and then again at the beginning of the 'Inside Out' chapter from his own point of view (p. 194):

Nick: This is Nick

Jonathan: Is this Nicholas Flynn?

Nick: Yes

Jonathan: Nicholas, this is your father, Jonathan Flynn.

Nick: It is?

Jonathan: It is. I have a question for you. Do you have a truck?

Nick: Yeah, as a matter of fact I do.

[...]

Jonathan: Good. Now I want you to get in your truck and drive over here.

Nick: What? Now you say you're my father?

Jonathan: That is correct. I was evicted and I need you to get over here and help me move my stuff, Nicholas.

Nick: How did you get this number?

Jonathan: Information. Now listen to me carefully –

(10:03-11:06)

In the film, Nick's perspective is preserved throughout the pragmatic exchange, his face closely framed to make visible the shock and incredulity he is feeling. The close shot emphasises Nick's subjective position as the empathic target, inviting the viewer to 'feel with' him in an extended "scene of empathy" that focuses on his facial affect to align the viewer with his experience (Plantinga, 1999) of the exchange.³² Conversely, Jonathan is rendered a disembodied voice at the end of the line, off screen until he begins to matter-of-factly describe his circumstances, at which point the cut reveals a close shot of Jonathan in a bathrobe (11:05). Nick is visibly unsettled to hear from his father after eighteen years, his confusion noticeably deepening as a result of Jonathan's direct and immediate demands, which are levied as his parental right. Though the dialogue is not expressly reported in the source memoir, the pivotal phone call articulates the primacy of self-witness, and foreshadows Nick and Jonathan meeting for the first time within the film to mark the point at which their separate narratives begin to interlock. The conversation ratifies the heretofore-arbitrary paternal link as a real intersubjective connection, to advance an explicit relational model that accords with the source whilst emphasising Nick's status as the autobiographical subject and testimonial 'I'.

Being Flynn's explicit relational structure further emerges through shared "sites" of autobiographical narration (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 69). Smith and Watson state that these sites can be "occasional, that is, specific to an occasion" and "locational, that is, emergent in a specific mise-en-scène or context of narration", both of which, in tandem, constitute "a moment in history [and] a socio-political space" (Smith and Watson, 2010: 2010: p. 69) specific to the autobiographical act. The Flynn's corresponding "situatedness"

³² The scene of empathy is explained in my analysis of *Arirang* in Chapter One.

(Smith and Watson, 2010: p 71) expedites explicit relationality through their shared occasional and locational sites. Smith and Watson explain: “[t]he emplotment of autobiographical narratives [...] can be described as a dense and multilayered intersection of the temporal and the geographic” (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 94); the Flynns’ spatiotemporal proximity provides the shared context that allows their relational story to unfold. It is Nick, through voiceover, who first articulates the connectedness he feels their narratives share, which references the “geographics” of relational identity formation and “the spaces of dynamic encounter” (Friedman, 1998: p. 19) that enable relational self-reflection:

Some part of me knew he would show up some day. If I stayed in one place long enough he would find me, like you’re taught to do when you’re lost. But what do you do if both of you are lost and you both end up in the same place, waiting?

(3:03-16)

The dialogue paraphrases the concluding passage of the ‘Ulysses’ chapter (*Suck City*: p. 24), which demonstrates that in both *Suck City* and *Being Flynn*, occasional and locational proximity facilitate the relational narrative, with the city of Boston as the shared geographical and socio-political site that instantiates an explicit, ‘situated’ relational dynamic.

The common “‘layers’ of narrative location” (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 71) that the city provides are alluded to in the memoir’s full title, *Another Bullshit Night in Suck City*, an evaluation that belongs to Jonathan Flynn (*Suck City*, p. 205). The city is responsible for bringing the Flynns into regular contact, the catalyst for the relational narrative. In the chapter ‘Cloverleaf’, Flynn’s descriptions of Boston emphasise the way his father navigates their shared site, mapping Jonathan’s experiential narrative through the places he frequents, and describing the city as “his floor plan” (p. 198) whilst he drifts ever-closer to homelessness. In the following chapter, ‘The Piss of God’ (pp. 204-205) Flynn uses the second person, “indefinite you” (Staels, 2004), as a heterophenomenological gesture meant to invite the reader to adopt Jonathan’s perspective, and to view the city as a ‘home’ for the homeless:

If not for the rats you could crawl beneath a bush. A bush. A bench. A bridge [...]. Rats too can pass through that needle’s eye to enter heaven, as easily as they pass into a box imagined into a house. Houses inside buildings, houses inside tunnels, some exist for only a day, some, miraculously, longer. This box held a refrigerator, the refrigerator is in an

apartment, a man is in the box. Tomorrow the box will be flattened and tossed, you've seen the garbagemen stomping them down to fit in the truck.

(p. 205)

In the very next chapter ('Countdown', pp. 206-207), Flynn reports seeing his father awoken on a bench on the Esplanade, from a distance, which leads him to reflect on heredity as metaphorically located:

scientists say that one day I could stand in the exact spot my father once stood, hold my body as he did. I could open my mouth and his words would come out. They say it is only a 'tendency toward', a warning. They say it is not the future, but a possible future.

(p. 207)

The three, successive, short chapters taken together demonstrate an underlying anxiety at the heart of Flynn's self-reflexive narrative, in terms of Flynn's fear of 'becoming' his father. However, the narrative construction evinces an inherent empathic track (Anderst, 2015) between Flynn and his father, whereby his fear is accompanied by an attempt to 'feel with' the elder man, prompted by proximity and Flynn's recognition of a potentially similar path for himself in the future.

The film also maps the city as though from Johnathan's perspective, in a progressive sequence of scenes that chart the way he inhabits the urban environment (taken from the 'Cloverleaf' chapter mentioned above), marking his "struggle" within the context of the parallel conversion narrative (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 91). After he is evicted from his apartment, Jonathan sleeps in his cab, but when he falls asleep at the wheel whilst drink-driving, he loses his licence and is rendered homeless. Initially, Jonathan is resilient, maintaining a façade of normalcy that is eventually shattered by the reality of his deteriorating circumstances. Jonathan subtly counts out his change to pay his bill at a cafe (33:00), before moving on to the library, where he writes a letter to the president, the contents of which are recounted in his voiceover (33:07). The letter characteristically pronounces Jonathan's inflated opinion of his artistic prowess, whilst remarking on the potential effects of illiteracy on the country's socio-economic future. When the library closes, Jonathan is both racist and indignant when the library attendant checking his bag takes out his toothbrush, protesting "that's my personal property, you ape" (33:43), as he snatches it from her hands. As night falls, Jonathan enters an ATM vestibule at the bank, holding the door for a departing patron before he steps past a homeless woman on the

floor inside. A homeless man hovering by the machine tells Jonathan “they’re making a movie, a movie of my life” (34:04), and Jonathan’s dismissive response is inflected with both irony and denial given the apparent similarity of their present circumstances and the auto/biographical tenor of the retrospective narrative; he levels: “that would be one boring, redundant, piece-of-shit movie” (34:18). Jonathan provides an alternate narrative for the action on screen through voiceover, in which he describes himself depositing a \$750, 000 advance cheque for his novel, *The Button Man*; but, he is shown throwing the deposit slip into the bin (34:25), and the scenes that follow illustrate the increasingly-desperate reality of his homelessness. The cut reveals a close-up of the opening hours on the door of a late-night coffee shop, which Jonathan studies before taking up a seat at the counter. Jonathan watches as the waitress gives coffee to a homeless man she knows by name, telling him “you have to take it outside” (34:52). Jonathan averts his gaze, and a shot of the clock is reversed to show him contemplating his own imminent departure. As Jonathan leaves the coffee shop, a high shot shows him adjusting his hat and buttoning up his coat against the cold. Another homeless man tries to steal Jonathan’s bag whilst he sleeps on a stone bench, and after fighting him off, Jonathan makes his way back towards the library as it snows. The camera follows Jonathan as he approaches the grated extraction fans in the floor, manoeuvring around the already sleeping bodies of the city’s homeless. Nick takes up the narration through voiceover:

He’s seen this before. Bums sprawled out from drinking, but
 he’s never actually stood over the blowers. Let the hot air seep
 into his clothes [...]. It’s another prison, these blowers,
 because once you’ve landed you can’t leave. Because one
 step off the blower is cold, hypothermia cold, now that *you* are
 sodden with steam. The blower is a room of heat with no walls.
 My father is an invisible man, in the invisible room, in the
 invisible city.

(my italics, 36:40-37:30)

Nick’s narration is closely paraphrased from the memoir (p. 203), and his use of the indefinite you (italicised above) echoes the empathic strategy in the ‘The Piss of God’ chapter described above. The retreating aerial shot of Jonathan frames him as small and vulnerable, curled up in the foetal position on the steam grates as the snow falls (see Figure 4.1) (37:30). Nick is shown hurrying towards the shelter after the jump-cut, bracing himself against the snow that connects the two scenes to highlight the shared situatedness of the city and underscore the severity of the conditions Jonathan faces on the streets. In spite of

Jonathan's façade of normalcy, the film depicts the reality of his homelessness, and the circumstances that lead him into regular contact with Nick, as the shared situatedness that drives the relational narrative.



Figure 4.1: *Jonathan sleeping on the steam grates, from above.*

In both the memoir and the film, the homeless shelter is the literal site where the Flynn's experience overlaps, and where the empathic dynamics of Flynn's autobiographical narrative are most keenly observed. Accordingly, in the film, both Flynn men become emotionally and socioeconomically invested in the shelter, first Nick as an employee, and then Jonathan as a service user or "guest". Day-to-day, Nick learns compassion for the shelter guests, with his colleagues guiding his interactions and encouraging empathy. For example, Nick's co-worker, Joy (Lili Taylor)³³ explains during his orientation that the shelter offers temporary respite from the downward trajectory imposed by destitution: "we catch them on the way down [...]. Next stop, the morgue" (23:44/ p. 31). Nick quickly realises that many of the men at the shelter will die, with many conditions – physical and mental illness, exposure to the elements, injury, and addiction – exacerbated and perpetuated by homelessness. In another scene, Nick asks a colleague how to decipher a guest's pants size in order to replace the soiled pair he is wearing, and his associate informs him matter-of-factly "you ask him" (28:38/ p. 39). Nick nods, leaving to make the enquiry, but the encounter reveals that a direct, communicative approach had not occurred to him prior to that moment, which marks a shift in his capacity for empathy and his ability to humanise the guests. These scenes transpose Flynn's real-life encounters at the shelter as reported in *Suck City*, which serve to demonstrate Nick's growing understanding of the guests who frequent the shelter, not as anonymous service-users, but as real people who need help. This realisation manifests as an irreconcilable tension when Flynn's father arrives at the shelter. When Nick comes face-to-face with his father at 'the cage' (see Figure 4.2) – the metal partition between the shelter's staff and the

³³ Lili Taylor is Nick Flynn's wife.

residents as they are signed in – Jonathan’s humility as a guest seeking sanctuary from the Boston streets conflicts with the earlier demands of an entitled, arrogant patriarch, which visibly challenges Nick’s long-held contempt for his absent father (38:08). Nick’s immediate response is to leave through the fire door, literally removing himself from the shared site in an attempt to process the conflict (38:53). When he returns to the shelter, he enters the dining room where Jonathan is shown at the centre of a wide shot, eating with the other guests, as Nick surveys the room in the background (39:26). In the film, the shared site of the shelter functions in two ways. Firstly, it provides the proximity that forces Nick to engage with his father directly, prompting a self-examination that looks beyond the anxiety of their perceived similarity towards the narrative exposition of Nick’s testimonial truth, to which I will return. And secondly, the shelter is both the occasional and locational site that makes visible the context for the autobiographical channels of empathy (Anderst, 2015) that emerge in the retrospective construction of Flynn’s auto/biographical narrative, both with himself and with his father.



Figure 4.2: *Nick and Jonathan come face-to-face at the shelter's 'cage'.*

Though Flynn explains in the memoir that he largely avoided contact with Jonathan during their shared time at the shelter, he includes letters that Jonathan wrote at that time, which he had passed on to Flynn via members of the shelter staff. Flynn’s inclusion of the unanswered letters evinces the empathic track between Flynn’s narrating ‘I’ and Jonathan at the time of writing *Suck City*, as distinct from the lack of an empathic connection between his narrated experiencing ‘I’ and his father in the past. Schmitt explains that in reading autobiography “one should never mistake the author as the *experiencer* and the author as the *narrator*” as “it is the latter who establishes the rhetorical strategy [of the autobiographical narrative] but it is also [the narrator] who gives [the reader] access, through the strategy, to the former” (original italics, 2017: p.138). The distance between the experience as narrated in autobiography, and the narrative strategies that can articulate it in retrospect are revealing of the agenda – or tone – of the autobiographical act. Flynn’s inclusion of the letters he received whilst avoiding his father at the shelter

demonstrates a shift in perspective that occurred after the experience and through the construction of the relational narrative, whereby Flynn belatedly re-evaluates Jonathan's attempt at communication, which results in the narrative expression of empathy with his father. This narrative strategy preserves the testimonial empathy with the past self and Flynn's own experiential reality as described in his framing narrative, but also exemplifies the way that explicitly auto/biographical narratives can reconcile self-witnessing and the ethical responsibility of referentiality to produce empathic and relational testimony.

When adapted, the invitation in auto/biography retains the subject's testimonial plea, but with a supplementary responsibility to reconcile the distance between actual experience and the belated, evaluative narrative perspective for the viewer. The letter cited in 'Like it or Not' (*Suck City*, pp. 215-217) informs two scenes in the film that illustrate Flynn's auto/biographical dynamic, described above, to enact the reality of Flynn's past experience, but with the autobiographical and testimonial perspective of the self-witness after the fact. In *Being Flynn* Jonathan exploits the shared site the shelter provides to enact the filial connection that the letter represents. First, Jonathan attempts to capitalise on Nick's role at the shelter to acquire a pen – an item that is banned in the sleeping quarters for safety reasons – attempting to justify his presence at the shelter as “an opportunity to see how the other half lives” (41:48). Jonathan explains that he is merely “gathering material” for his literary pursuits, alleging that Nick's motive for working there is the same as his (41:54). In the diegetic present, Nick sees his job at the shelter as “a job that means something” (20:19), with the experience only becoming what Jonathan terms “grist for the mill” (p. 215) in the retrospective act of self-witness, through the literary auto/biographical narrative. Jonathan uses his writing to assert further inflammatory similarities between himself and his son, with the observation that writers are “particularly prone to madness” (45:56/ p. 215) in a letter sent via the staff at the shelter, suggesting that their individual instabilities are related to their common creative impulse. The second scene to draw from the letter depicts a conversation between Nick and Jonathan during Nick's evening checks of the shelter's dorms, after Jonathan is caught trying to sneak alcohol into the shelter. As Nick stands silently over his father, who initially appears to be asleep, Jonathan asks “did you read my last letter? [...] Beautifully written wasn't it?”, at which point Nick levels “don't write to me about my fucking mother”. The exchange becomes heated when Jonathan scolds Nick about his use of profanity, with Nick asserting “You don't get to patronise me. You don't get to pretend to be my father, and you don't get to write about my mother. In fact, stop writing me at all. Stop writing me letters” (52:52:53:58). Jonathan further antagonises Nick, repeating a rumour he's heard about Nick's drug use, before concluding with the aggressive declaration “Remember

something Nicholas. You are me! You are me, I made you!”. Nick responds with the vehement denial “I am not you!” (54:44-54:54), before reiterating his earlier directive for Jonathan to leave the shelter. The way Weitz adapts the letter as an intersubjective encounter, manifests the tension implicit in Nick’s attempts to repress and simultaneously address the issues Jonathan’s absence – and sudden presence – brings to the fore. Furthermore, the discussion of the letter highlights Flynn’s mother’s role as the missing link in the relational testimonial narrative, as the unspoken connection that binds the Flynn’s and their narratives.

In *Suck City*, the tone of Nick Flynn’s auto/biographical testimony is determined by Jonathan Flynn’s absence, which is coded as presence throughout Flynn’s formative years. Flynn’s recognition of his father’s absenteeism as significant appears in both the memoir and the film: “all my life my father has been manifest as an absence, a nonpresence [sic], a name without a body” (p. 24/01:28). Flynn’s phrasing suggests physicality, with the ‘weight’ of his father’s absence further implied in the evaluation that follows the above assertion in the ‘Ulysses’ chapter: “The three of us sat around the table, my mother, brother and I, carrying his name. *Flynn?*” (original italics, *Suck City*: p. 24). In *Suck City*, Flynn makes clear that his father’s ‘nonpresence’ shaped both his and his mother’s lives in substantial and related ways, beginning before he was even born. Jonathan missed both Nick’s (p. 22) and his elder brother’s births (p. 18), seemingly without a concrete excuse, leaving his friend Ray to drive Jody to the hospital on each occasion. When Jonathan’s car dealership folded, he became increasingly unreliable, drinking heavily and falling further into debt, which led Jody to leave him just five months after Nick was born. The lack of financial support, or “Nonsupport” (p. 34), from Jonathan, is framed in the memoir as the reason for Jody’s multiple jobs, and is further implicated in her taste in men. Jody engages in a number of romantic relationships in an attempt to find a suitable replacement for Nick’s absent father, with the men she chooses described as “the rotating cast of father figures who’d been [his mother’s] husbands, lovers, friends” (p. 300) in *Suck City*. The men who temporarily occupy the paternal void are each afforded brief but succinct characterisations, as Flynn evaluates their impact upon his homelife during his formative years. Flynn states “Vernon was a carpenter [...]. He was also married” (p. 68), explaining that he renovated their first house after a fire, “which turned out not to be such a bad thing” as his mother was able to claim the insurance and hire Vernon to carry out the repairs, conveniently allowing them to spend more time together “without arousing suspicion” (p. 68). Then, there was “Travis, just back from Vietnam [...] twenty-one and still looks like a Marine”, who was married to his mother for four years and helped to extend their house; Flynn characterises Travis as a “trigger-hippie” who was

“armed to the teeth”, drinking and smoking marijuana, as well as committing petty theft (p. 79). According to Flynn, Liam, whom Jody dated twice, ten years apart, “looked like Tom Jones” and was “in the business of smuggling drugs” whilst “working at the fish pier in Plymouth” (p. 136). The pier is where Flynn met Keith, who “always [asked] after” his mother, and who took him on as both an apprentice electrician and criminal accomplice in “the Organization” during the period leading up to Flynn’s first year at college (pp. 140-143). Counter to Flynn’s mother’s aspirations to provide a father figure, the men who enter, and inevitably leave, the Flynn family’s lives affect them in predominantly negative ways, with both Flynn and his mother becoming dependent upon alcohol and drugs in large part due to their availability via Jody Flynn’s partners. In the memoir, the testimonial tone articulates Flynn’s experience of parental instability, which for him is irrevocably linked to his father.

The inconsistency of Flynn’s paternal proxies is represented, and compressed on screen in a game of catch: a young Nick (Liam Broggy) throws a baseball back and forth, yet each time the camera tracks the toss, there is a different man in the catcher’s position (44:20-44:45). In this Freudian game of “fort/da” (1920), the last instance shows Jonathan on the receiving end wearing the catcher’s mitt; but, as the camera follows the ball for the final time, it rolls into the road as Jonathan has vanished, replaced by Jody in a waitress’ uniform carrying large paper bags full of groceries. This is a particularly rich and multifaceted scene that functions in a number of ways within the film’s relational narrative, but is particularly revealing of the film’s fidelity to the tone of the source text. First of all, the game of catch conveys that the bonds between Nick and his “father figurines” (*Suck City*, p. 302) are unstable and fleeting, positing them as “contingent others” within the auto/biographical narrative, as those “who populate the text as actors in the narrator’s script of meaning but are not deeply reflected on” (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 86). The brevity of this paternal history is symptomatic of auteurbiographical adaptations’ necessarily narrow social frame, which is limited to ensure that the subject retains primacy as the empathic target of the cinematic narrative of witness, as established in Chapter Three. This is a particularly pertinent adaptive strategy for auto/biographies, which carry the additional referential responsibility to signify more than one relational other as embedded in the autobiographical subject’s script of meaning. Secondly, the way that Jody steps into the markedly vacant catcher’s position to retrieve Nick’s ball, and agrees to play with him despite her obvious exhaustion, underscores her constancy in direct contrast with Jonathan’s absence, which is accentuated by the backdrop of unreliable and deficient patriarchs. Furthermore, the game of catch is a subtle acknowledgement of the

significance of baseball in the memoir, as Flynn describes the way “watching baseball on television” (p. 101) served as a ritual of support and cohesion for his family:

Part of watching the Red Sox together was to hunker down, circle the wagons, show a unified front [...]. But the greater (if unspoken) part for my brother and me was to be close to our mother, to keep an eye on her. It was clear she was slipping away from us, from this world.

(*Suck City*: p. 103)

In *Suck City*, baseball becomes symbolic of familial solidarity for Flynn, and the film transposes this notion by limiting the game to two constant players: Nick and Jody.

The connotations of closeness and concern signified by the baseball game are invoked in a later scene in *Being Flynn* as a young Nick enquires about his misplaced glove. Jody light-heartedly chides “if it were up your ass you’d know where it was” (13:03) in a line taken directly from the pages of *Suck City*, in which Flynn describes his mother’s “playful and surreal” (p. 64) turn of phrase as a characteristic of hers that he loved. The phrase is included in the film to illustrate the good-humoured dynamic between mother and son, but it also foreshadows a significant traumatic event. The phrase recurs in a later flashback scene, the first in which Nick is older, with Paul Dano in place of Liam Broggy to mark the passage of time. Jody is visibly dishevelled, clearing up beer bottles from the night before, and her delivery of the phrase is markedly less energetic. Nick teases his mother, completing her expression before she can finish it, whilst he attempts to locate his lost notebook (59:26). The missing notebook contains Nick’s unfinished short story, the contents of which prompt Jody’s suicide. Flynn writes in the memoir:

I had begun a story about a woman who works two jobs and tries to fit in a couple of hours between each to be with her kids [...]. I didn’t get to the part where it becomes clear that those moments they had together between her jobs were precious.

(*Suck City*: p. 152)

Although Flynn had intended to convey appreciation and understanding of his mother’s commitment to him through his writing, as he does throughout his memoir, Flynn reports that instead, she saw her own struggles in print, before choosing to end her own life. Jody’s onscreen death closely resembles Flynn’s account from *Suck City*, in which he describes her suicide note and her final actions as he understands them:

She begins by writing how she has just finished reading my notebook, about how perceptive I am [...]. After swallowing a fistful of painkillers she goes for a walk along Peggotty Beach. An hour later she comes back home, groggy. "I was unable to throw myself in the ocean," she writes, the handwriting more erratic as the painkillers seep into every cell.

(*Suck City*: p. 153)

The fatal shot is not depicted but implied in the film, as Jody is shown soaking wet, retrieving Travis's pistol from her closet, an action that references her final words as reported in the memoir: "*Why don't you use the gun?*" (original italics, *Suck City*: p. 153). The faithful interpretation of Flynn's account of Jody's final moments is intercut with scenes of Nick, intoxicated and smoking drugs in a stairwell in the narrative present in the film. The oscillating episode is further appended with flashbacks to a subtle encounter from Nick's childhood: Jody offers Nick her leftover ice-cream to deflect his concern about her wellbeing (1:00-1:02:15), which subtly illustrates the intuition she credits Nick with in her suicide note. The splicing together of Nick's drug abuse with the circumstances of Jody's suicide and the memory of a childhood encounter with his mother hiding her pain explicates the link between the "major trauma" (*Suck City*, p. 154) of Nick's loss of his mother and his psychological deterioration. The catalyst for Nick's rapid "descent into darkness" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 91.) is the incident depicted in the previous scene, whereby Jonathan is barred from the shelter because Nick fails to intervene on his behalf. This intricate sequence constitutes Nick's "moment of crisis" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 91) within the context of the film's conversion narrative. This moment culminates in the narrative nexus of Nick's father's expulsion from the shelter, which effectively condemns Jonathan to homelessness once more, and his mother's death, for which Nick also feels responsible. The confluence of guilt and grief, both past and present, and the ways in which they collide and recur through parental presence and absence are indicative of the trauma at the heart of the testimonial adaptation.

Being Flynn's relational structure initially posits a reconciliatory story about a father and a son, in which both men struggle to convert a genetic connection into a real relationship. However, the film's symbolic game of catch and the suturing of the before, during, and after of trauma in the montage described above elaborate upon *Suck City*'s explicitly bilateral paradigm of relationality, to articulate Jody Flynn's significant role in Flynn's autobiographical formation of selfhood. Furthermore, the two sequences, both of which are distinctly auteurial interventions, demonstrate Weitz's perceptive, empathic and ethical interpretation of Jody's death as pivotal to the self-witnessing agenda of Flynn's

auto/biographical narrative. The tone and “subjective signature” (Schmitt, 2017: p. 150) of Flynn’s self-witnessing narrative are retained, but Weitz subtly inserts Jody Flynn’s story within the explicitly bilateral relational cinematic structure of the film as an introspective facet of Nick’s testimonial narrative, to preserve the dual subjective focus of auto/biography asserted in the memoir. In the film, Jody’s role is revealed in fragments through Nick’s memory, as part of the traumatic context for his testimony; consequently, *Being Flynn* exhibits a supplementary relational level that embeds Jody as “the idealized absent other”, as a figure “central to self-understanding” (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 87) within the relational and testimonial auto/biographical model. Flynn explains that Weitz described Jody as “the specter [sic] hanging over every scene” of the film, and that “her presence, her death animates the living” (Flynn, 2013: p. 113). Jody’s death, and the ongoing impact it has on Nick’s sense of self, exacerbate the existential conflict caused by his father’s unexpected reappearance. The inversion of the parental presence/absence paradigm – losing Jody, and belatedly finding, or being found by, Jonathan – is the crisis at the core of Flynn’s literary testimony, which is consistently, if creatively, transposed in the adaptation.

The primacy of Flynn’s testimony is clear from the moment Nick reclaims narrative authority from Jonathan in the opening scenes, right through to the film’s emancipatory conclusion that sees Nick a published author with a family of his own. This assertive, testimonial narrative framing is instrumental to the film’s transmission of Flynn’s autobiographical invitation, and equally important to the film’s transmission of Flynn’s self-witnessing narrative in spite of Robert De Niro’s distinguished acting calibre. For Janet Hirshenson and Jane Jenkins, “star” status is reserved for “actors who become the selling point for the movie” and “one of the main reasons people will come to see it” (2006: p. 22), a quality that is predicated on an actor’s “bankability” (McDonald, 2013: p. 23) in terms of increasing a film’s potential commercial return. In addition, “‘Star’ is a relational rather than substantive term” Paul McDonald argues, as “certain actors can only be regarded as stars because others aren’t” (2013: p. 24). In *Being Flynn*, the casting of a bankable star like De Niro opposite a comparably less commercial actor like Dano could have jeopardised the film’s subjective testimonial focus, a decision further complicated by De Niro’s history of leading roles and memorable cinematic characters within the mainstream, commercial context of Hollywood studio films. De Niro’s star status brings with it the inevitable intertextuality of his former screen performances, whereby his voice and his body invoke memories of his previous roles for the viewer. De Niro as Jonathan driving a yellow cab in *Being Flynn* bears reference to his iconic character in the acclaimed Martin Scorsese film, *Taxi Driver* (1976), where he played the troubled veteran, Travis Bickle; likewise,

Jonathan's temper and sporadic violent outbursts invoke De Niro's portrayal of Jake LaMotta in the controversial adaptation *Raging Bull* (1980).³⁴ However, reflecting on De Niro's casting, Flynn declares him "perfect for the part", stating that, as well as being age appropriate, De Niro could "embody a degree of both grandeur and menace" that enables the viewer to "believe, on some level, [Jonathan's] claim that he is above the situation he finds himself in" (Flynn, 2013: p. 132). De Niro was also able to capture the "bite" of Jonathan Flynn's personality that led Flynn to believe his father could "destroy" him if he got too close (2013: p. 133). In spite of De Niro's undeniable screen presence and "actorly" authority (Cobb, 2011: p. 41), the film remains focused on Nick's self-witnessing agenda. The clarity and consistency of Nick's narrative authority and autobiographical invitation on screen, coupled with his successful 'conversion' – or liberation – at the end of the film, underscores Weitz's commitment to factual integrity, and the film's auteurbiographical achievement as secondary testimony.

Weitz's adaptation faithfully transposes Nick Flynn's auto/biographical narrative of self-witness, preserving the explicit relational dynamic of his memoir to privilege his autobiographical and testimonial invitation. Nick's narrating 'I' frames the cinematic narrative, using subjective voiceover conventions that embed Jonathan Flynn's voice as citation, and his story as biography within the film. The channels of empathic relation that are present between Nick Flynn and Jonathan Flynn are remediated through notions of proximity, which are facilitated through the shared occasional and locational sites of the autobiographical narrative. Weitz's adaptation translates the shared situatedness of the relational narrative on film as more than just setting or context, highlighting the ways in which the city becomes an extension of Jonathan to manifest his presence in absence. The film's undulating narrative structure posits the underlying anxiety inherent in Flynn's memoir, to convey to the viewer Nick's resistance to his filial history as inflected by his traumatic past. Weitz stylistically weaves the stories of significant and related others through the self-witnessing narrative, demonstrating a perceptive and empathic engagement with Flynn's testimony and its inherently relational construction. In spite of De Niro's powerful performance and relative stardom, Dano's portrayal of Nick captures the traumatic conflict of Flynn's subjective truth in an authoritative assertion of the autobiographical 'I'. Ultimately, the relational structure and testimonial tone of Flynn's auto/biographical narrative are preserved, and the adaptation reissues the autobiographical invitation to bear witness as cinematic secondary testimony within the continuum of cinematic I-witnessing.

³⁴ Based on LaMotta's memoir *Raging Bull: My Story* (1970)

Julie and Julia – and Nora (and Meryl): Which Chick’s Flick?

In an extensive promotional interview for *Julie & Julia*, Ephron admitted that when she first read about Powell’s blog project in Amanda Hesser’s piece in the *New York Times*, she felt the story was not “a movie” (‘TimesTalks’: 01:31). Ephron further explained that it was not until Colombia bought the rights to Powell’s memoir with a plan to incorporate Child’s story that she could envision working on the film, after which she made clear her desire for full auteurial control from the outset (‘TimesTalks’: 02:10-02:45). Where *Being Flynn* adapts one, single-authored relational auto/biography, *Julie & Julia* is purportedly “based on two true stories” (01:15), adapting two distinct autobiographies, namely: Julie Powell’s 2005 memoir, *Julie and Julia: My Year of Cooking Dangerously* (2005) (hereafter *Cooking Dangerously*)³⁵ and Julia Child’s *My Life in France* (2006). The transposition of more than one source text immediately increases the auteurbiographical labour and the referential responsibility of factual integrity. However, Ephron’s adaptation is even more complex than this intertextual claim suggests, which underlies my decision to include *Julie & Julia* as a limit case within the context of Contemporary Cinematic I-Witnessing.

With two female subjects, a renowned – and rare – female auteur, and a female star in one of the title roles, *Julie & Julia* brings to the fore the gendered discourse of film authorship/ownership and adaptation. These issues are further determined by the interrelated expectations and limitations levied by the commercial and patriarchal Hollywood arena. As advanced in my analysis of *Being Flynn*, star status and the auteur’s creative approach can affect the viewer’s ‘reading’ of auteurbiographical adaptations, in terms of intertextuality, subjective focus, and the testimonial tone of the adapted discourse. *Julie & Julia* is the first text in the thesis to address the cinematic representation of a celebrity, in the figure of Julia Child, which alters the witnessing dynamic and the way that the subject is read. Unlike *Being Flynn*, then, *Julie & Julia* is a complex *mise en abyme* adaptation, with intricate, and sometimes competing, levels of representation, through which I interrogate the limits of auteurbiographical adaptation.

Julie Powell’s memoir, *Cooking Dangerously*, is an overtly constructed literary adaptation of her blog, with the addition of imagined vignettes based on her aspirational engagement with Julia Child as a cook, author and public figure. Powell’s adaptive labour supplements the original diary format of the blog to add personal details and additional autobiographical context, as well as the organised insertion of Child’s biographical narrative. Ephron used

³⁵ I refer specifically to the Penguin Books film tie-in reprint (2009), which was retitled but otherwise unchanged from initial publication.

both the blog and the memoir to inform the adaptive process. Secondly, as the film's opening titles confirm, *Julie & Julia* is also based on *My Life in France* (2006), the "as-told-to" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 67) autobiography Julia Child wrote collaboratively with her great nephew, Alex Prud'homme: although she died before the volume was complete. The book is written in the first person, with a clear iteration of the autobiographical 'I', but the paratextual inscription of a co-author inevitably complicates the notion of autobiographical authority. Thirdly, Ephron and members of the cast conducted their own supplementary research, much like the auteurial équipe in *The Diving Bell*, reading archived letters and Noël Riley Fitch's *Appetite for Life: The Biography of Julia Child* (1999), and watching videos of Child's numerous appearances on television. And, finally, Child's status as a well-known celebrity chef installs multiple levels of signification, whereby those involved in the adaptation – and the viewer – attempt to reconcile familiar, intertextual aspects of Child's public persona with her cinematic representation in the process of bearing witness. With multiple sources and two distinct subjects, the prospect of auteurbiographical adaptation is immediately more complex, in terms of the commitment to factual integrity that the process entails and the greater referential responsibility that relational narratives impose. Ultimately, I explore the ways in which these additional factors affect factual integrity and the autobiographical invitation in *Julie & Julia*, towards an understanding of the conditions that reveal the limits of cinematic I-witnessing as an autobiographical and testimonial approach.

Julie & Julia begins *in medias res*, with Julia Child (Meryl Streep)³⁶ and her husband Paul (Stanley Tucci) arriving in France, as they begin the last leg of their transatlantic journey in their freshly transported, American car, an intertitle providing the date and location within the first minute: "France, 1949". The mise-en-scène is quintessentially French, with tracking shots enriched by images of the Eiffel tower and the unspoilt countryside, a French cafe marking their arrival in the capital and at their new home. The accompanying score, 'Julia's Theme', features optimistic and upbeat accordions, which perfectly matches the Childs' mood as they embark upon their continental adventure. Julia eventually introduces herself through character-to-character dialogue rather than subjective voiceover, with the assertion "*Je suis Julia Child*" as the first diegetic reference to the real person (02:55). After the jump cut, a closely framed copy of Child's *Mastering the Art of French Cooking* in the original red and white *fleur de lis* cover is packed into a box marked cookbooks, symbolic of the narrative hinge that connects its owner, Julie Powell (Amy

³⁶ I use Julia when referring to Julia Child the character in the film, and Child when referring to the author/person.

Adams),³⁷ and the woman who wrote it within the film's relational structure. The sequence that follows depicts the Powells moving from Bay Ridge to "Queens, New York 2012", driving their boxed belongings in the back of an old Jeep, complemented by a more pedestrian rise and fall leitmotif, 'Julie's Theme', which is expectant and played on modern strings. The parallel depictions of the women moving home with their respective husbands are suggestive of their similarities within the cinematic narrative, and their respective realities and "material locations[s] of subjectivity" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 77) are hereby charted, aesthetically sympathetic in complementary colours, but with period sets and costuming providing visual distinctions between their story worlds for the viewer. The film's oscillating structure, much like *Being Flynn*'s, allows Julie's and Julia's narratives to emerge in tandem, reflecting the structure of Powell's memoir. Though the focal subjects are introduced, there is no clear assertion of narrative authority or the contingent articulation of the narrating 'I' in the opening scenes, making it unclear how the relational structure operates and delaying the invitation to emersive viewership that is predicated on the cinematic conventions of autobiographical subjectivity. Consequently, the subjective stories are convened in an "implicit" relational dynamic (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 44) that accords with the structure of Powell's memoir, but without the requisite diegetic cues that can confirm a referential claim to an auto/biographical source.

Julie's autobiographical invitation, along with her formal diegetic introduction, comes much later, in the scene where she begins the Julie/Julia blog project and composes her first post. Julie's husband, Eric (Chris Messina), helps her to set up the blog on her laptop, and then a series of progressive shot-reverse shots show Julie writing the initial post on her blog page (see Figure 4.3) as the words she writes are heard in the subjective voiceover (16:24-17:23). Though the autobiographical invitation comes comparatively late, this scene follows the same convention for establishing the narrating 'I' as autobiographical 'I' as was observed in *Being Flynn*, whereby the proper name is reconciled with the autobiographical subject through corresponding written and spoken assertions of the narrating 'I'. In addition, Julie's blog is the basis for the "virtual bond" (Benson-Allott, 2010: p. 83) that underscores the relational structure of the film narrative, framing Julia as a pedagogical and aspirational figure within the context of Julie's autobiographical act. Through the blog, Julie uses self-reflexive writing to document the practicalities of the project in real time, and her narrative authority in the film is further emphasised through her voiceover, which accompanies swift, day-to-day sequences that elide the passage of

³⁷ I use Julie when referring to Julie Powell the character in the film, and Powell when referring to the author/person.

time between blog posts, as she works progressively through the recipes in Child's cookbook.

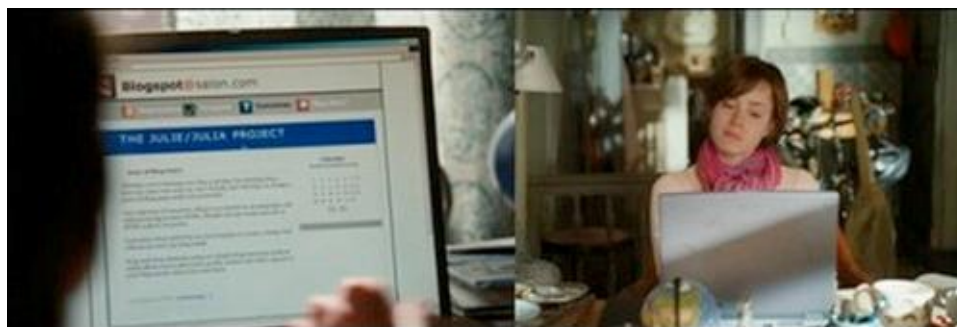


Figure 4.3: *Julie writing her blog.*

By contrast, Julia's voice in the film not presented as her own. The first occasion that voiceover is deployed within Julia's narrative occurs in an early scene whereby Julia is shown navigating a Parisian market, but it is her husband, Paul's voice that can be heard, reciting the words of a letter he is writing to his brother, Charlie. Paul describes Julia's adjustment to the French lifestyle, and the way in which the French are adjusting to Julia: "Dear Charlie, we're settled in finally and Julia loves it here. She wants to stay forever. You know how famously grouchy the French can be, dear brother, but Julia brings out the best in a polecat" (18:20-37). Though the content of the letter is paraphrased from Paul Child's genuine correspondence (Riley Fitch, 1999: p. 159),³⁸ the inclusion of Paul's voiceover rather than Julia's complicates the narrative framework and undermines the assumed parallel structure. Julia's voiceover does not appear until just under a quarter of the way through the film, as she begins to attend cooking school. Julia begins with the salutation 'Dear Avis' (32:30), representative of a detached, epistolary communication with an as-yet-unknown-to-the-viewer acquaintance, rather than the direct assertion of Julie's narrating 'I' described above. Though the viewer is seemingly granted access to the Childs' private communiqué, the subjective perspective and immediacy of the autobiographical invitation are absent from Julia's voiceover, which lacks the agency and narrative authority of the autobiographical 'I'.

Instead, I argue that Julia is presented as a narrated, biographical subject, and as an auteurial assemblage based on the literary *mise en abyme* of sources consulted during the adaptive process. In *Cooking Dangerously*, Child is portrayed as Powell imagines her, and the implicit relational structure is facilitated by Powell's inclusion of creatively reconstructed vignettes between her own self-referential chapters. These were informed

³⁸ In Riley Fitch's biography, the letter was reportedly addressed to the Kublers, who were friends of the Childs, but do not appear in the film.

by Powell's engagement with Julia Child's televisual oeuvre and the auto/biographical writings by and about her (including Riley Fitch's biography). These episodes portray Julia as an "annoyingly ebullient, oddly compelling giant of a woman" (*Cooking Dangerously*: p. 58) who was "unsophisticated, charming, excitable" (p. 167), and "raucous" (p. 241), observations Powell frames as Paul Child's retrospective reportage in dated, diaristic entries. The Julia Child that emerges in Powell's memoir is essentially a caricature, but the primary objective of these narrative inserts is to identify Julia's great passions – her husband and food – as similar to Powell's. Nora Ephron, in turn, embarked upon her own auteurbiographical investigation, consulting Child's family, and studying interviews, auto/biographies, letters, and her TV work to ensure that Julia's story was faithfully told, in the same emersive contextual labour undertaken by the auteurial équipe in *The Diving Bell*. Accordingly, *Julie & Julia* blends Powell's auto/biographical 'version' of Julia – "the great JC" (*Cooking Dangerously*: p. 93) that inspired her combined culinary and literary efforts – with Ephron's auteurbiographical construction, to create the "great big good fairy" (14:10) embodied by Meryl Streep. In the 'making of' documentary included as a special feature on the DVD, Streep confirms that the Julia in the film is less a reenactment of the late Julia Child than a performative interpretation of Powell's literary version mobilised by Ephron's script:

Julia Child was a larger-than-life character. So, while I felt a responsibility, certainly to her legacy and her memory, of the great work that she did and the essence of her character, I'm not really doing Julia Child, I'm doing Julie Powell's idea of who she was.

(Streep in 'Secret Ingredients' 6:30-6:48)

Fundamentally, the Julia on screen is a "characterisation" of Julia Child rather than an "impersonation" according to one of the film's producers, Laurence Mark ('Secret Ingredients': 6:57-7:00), which implies that the film's Julia is a transposition of Powell's aspirational and implicitly relational other rather than a representation of the real person. As a result, the relational structure of the film renders Julia's voice a reconstructed citation of the myriad auto/biographical and metatextual sources, and "the idealized absent other" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 87) of Powell's memoir, instead of a distinct, self-reflexive autobiographical subject with her own autobiographical invitation, which accords with the implicit relational dynamic advanced in Powell's memoir.

Powell's inclusion of Child as a relational auto/biographical subject in her memoir is an acknowledgement of her influence as a role-model throughout the practical aspects of the Julie/Julia Project; she describes Child as 'the polestar of my existence' (*Cooking*

Dangerously: p. 125) and claims that, during the project, she existed in ‘the Juliaverse’ (p. 125). Powell recognises her inclusion of Child’s story as an appreciative and adaptive interpretation (see Hutcheon 2013), which she explains in the paratextual author’s note that precedes the memoir proper:

the scenes from the lives of Paul Child and Julia McWilliams Child are purely works of imagination, inspired by events described in the journals and letters of Paul Child, the letters of Julia McWilliams, and the biography of Julia Child, *Appetite for Life*, by Noël Riley Fitch. I thank Ms. Riley Fitch for her fine work, and the Schlesinger Library at Harvard University for generously making Mrs. Child’s archives available to the public.

(*Cooking Dangerously*: n.p.)

Unlike the genetic, locational, and occasional similitude shared by the Flynns as explicit relationality, and preserved by Weitz in *Being Flynn* through the emphasis of shared sites and situatedness, Julie and Julia’s relationality is entirely manufactured, firstly, by Powell in her memoir, and subsequently by Ephron in the film. Consequently, Julie and Julia’s shared sites are thematic rather than material; they are connected by their culinary labour, their gender, and the common domestic spaces of their individual self-remaking projects, which posits an implicit *relational alignment* rather than an explicit, embedded relational structure. As a result, the only autobiographical invitation in the film is issued by Julie, with her story functioning as a narrative frame for Julia’s, in line with the relational structure of Powell’s memoir.

The film further facilitates relational alignment by emphasising Julie and Julia’s shared “positionality”, which, as explained in Chapter One, refers to culturally determined “discourses of identity” (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 215). Julie considers her “subject position” (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 215) similar to Julia’s; she articulates the similarities as “major overlaps” on screen during a reflective blog entry:

I’ve been thinking about me and Julia. She was a secretary for a government agency, and I am too. A really nice guy married her; a really nice guy married me. Both of us were lost, and both of us were saved by food in some way or other.

(1:27:06-1:27:20)

Julie’s simplistic assessment of the attributes she shares with Julia epitomises the parameters of relational alignment in the film, as determined by their jobs, their respective

supportive relationships, and a shared love of food. Their secretarial similarities are largely unexplored in the film, to which I return in the discussion of tone, with marriage and cooking becoming the central focus of their relational alignment. Julie goes on to identify the ways in which she feels she and Julia are not alike in the same scene mentioned above:

but let's face it. I am not Julia Child. Julia Child never lost her temper just because something boiled over or collapsed in the oven, or just plain fell through. And she was never horrible to her husband, I'm sure. She never behaved like who has time to be married? Which is how I behave sometimes I'm sorry to say. I wish I were more like her. She deserved her husband and I don't. That's the truth. Well anyway, that's the truth for now.

(1:27:21-1:28:00)

In this post Julie identifies the differences between herself and Julia as flaws, which further emphasises the way that the idealised figure of Julia functions within her self-remaking project, just as in Powell's memoir. Julie not only values Julia's culinary expertise, she also looks to her relationship with Paul as an example of a healthy and supportive marriage. Though the above blog post does not appear in either of Powell's source texts, marking it as an auteurial interpretation, the post preserves Julie's – and by extension, Powell's – autobiographical invitation by positing Julie's relational engagement with Julia as "central to self-understanding" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 87) in the context of the blog's testimonial tenor.

The fidelity mandated by factual integrity holds the preservation of subjective truth as paramount. Ephron's task as the auteur is to adapt the available source material to create a cinematic text that can transpose the autobiographical invitation to testimonial witnessing in a faithful and cinematically engaging way. However, Ephron's auteurial authority in Hollywood is largely attributable to the commercial success of her films, most of which are categorised as chick flicks and/or romantic comedies – terms that are often used synonymously – as mentioned above. According to Claire Mortimer:

The romantic comedy seeks to involve the spectator in the characters' emotional journey; we need to care about their ordeals [...]. In this respect it is important that the spectator can relate to and feel empathy for the characters.

(2010: p. 82)

Mortimer equates romantic comedy's affective capacity with Barthesian *jouissance*, which she contends "is an uncontrolled pleasure which is difficult to rationalise, creating a more intense relationship between the film and the spectator" (2010: p. 78), which renders the romantic comedy genre "one of the more affecting genres [...] in terms of eliciting an affective response" (2010: p. 78). As the primary directive of an auteurbiographical adaptation is to invite the viewer to bear witness to and empathise with the autobiographical subject's testimonial truth, the empathic potential of the romantic comedy genre can, in principle, be considered compatible with the cinematic I-witnessing agenda. Schmitt contends that autobiographical texts capitalise on "readers' expectations and perceptions of the generic contract offered by the author" (Schmitt, 2017: p. 33), which, as I have argued throughout, extends to viewers' engagement with cinematic texts as representative of autobiographical experience. In *Julie & Julia*, the viewership pact is determined by both generic markers of romantic comedy and the subjective conventions of the filmic autobiographical invitation. As the auteurbiographical adaptative process is governed by an ethical and empathic commitment to factual integrity, it is theoretically possible for an adapted film with source material that lends itself to the romantic comedy genre, to function as secondary testimony, provided the tone of the source text(s) is preserved.

As explained in Chapter Three, the tone of an autobiographical narrative cultivates the reader's perception of intimacy (see Schmitt, 2017), which promotes an empathic connection with the autobiographical subject. For Schmitt, "tone is an authorial strategy guided by the will to create the original experience" through the autobiographical narrative, "but also, in a fundamental manner, by the psychological profile of the author" (2017: p.141). Powell adopts a somewhat cynical and distinctly self-deprecating register from the blog project's inception, which reflects her desire to convey the self-remaking experience of the project, rather than a narcissistic or indulgent creative impulse. In *Being Flynn*, Nick admits early in the film that he's "sort of trying to be a writer" (01:15), but the narrative reveals that his writing offers more than a creative outlet. For Flynn, writing *Suck City* was a form of "scriptotherapy", which Suzette Henke describes as a "process of writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic reenactment" (2000: p. xii) (as mentioned in Chapters Two and Three). In *Being Flynn*, Nick's writing is framed as a response to the traumatic experience of loss, which accords with the tone of the source text and its inherent autobiographical invitation. In Powell's case, the project represents a similarly therapeutic outlet, which combines the practices of cooking and self-reflexive writing as a remedial response to cultural trauma, to which I will return. In *Julie & Julia*, Julie's invitation is evident, but distorted by a shift in tone, as the narrative centres on

personal, existential anxiety rather than the complex conflict Powell articulates in the source texts. Powell's decision to cook her way through Julia Child's cookbook was not an arbitrary one, as seemingly suggested in the film; it was the conscious undertaking of a creative "opportunity" intended to make her feel "better" (25/11/02). At just over halfway through the project, Powell reiterates this sentiment in her blog to ensure that her readers understand the project as more than self-congratulatory navel gazing:

I hope that no one thinks that my intention here is to flaunt my culinary expertise. To me that seems obvious, but maybe it isn't. I simply thought it would be good for me, and hopefully entertaining for others, to map my progress as not an accomplished, but a passionate, cook, using the Julie/Julia project as a tool.

(14/03/03)

In this post, Powell rejects the notion of narcissism, instead reaffirming the project as a necessarily self-reflexive and therapeutic vehicle for personal development, which manifests an autobiographical and testimonial narrative invitation through the blog.

By contrast, Julie is portrayed throughout *Julie & Julia* as "hypersensitive, self-absorbed, and shrill" (Benson-Allott, 2010: p. 84), which demonstrates a significant deviation from the source texts, foregrounded as Ephron's auteurial invention. The ways in which one particular episode from Powell's memoir is reimagined in the film offers a clear example of adaptive deviation. In *Cooking Dangerously*, Powell explains that a journalist from *The Christian Science Monitor* contacted her to arrange for her to cook for Judith Jones, Julia Child's original editor for *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. For myriad reasons, including weather conditions and Jones' reluctance to travel to Powell's apartment in Long Island, the much-anticipated meeting is cancelled. But, in the memoir, the journalist does eat with Julie and her husband and the evening is salvaged in spite of Powell's disappointment (*Cooking Dangerously*, pp. 101-106). In the film, neither Jones nor the journalist attend to eat with Julie, and the frustration of her wasted efforts leads to a fight with her husband in which he criticises her commitment to the project. In the midst of the argument, Eric accuses Julie of egotism, asking: "what's gonna [sic] happen when you're no longer the centre of the universe?" (01:16:59), to which Julie concedes: "Ok maybe I'm being a little narcissistic [...] but what do you think a blog is? It's me, me, me, day after day" (1:16:28). Eric responds with a scathing evaluation:

I thought it'd be fun. How stupid is that? It just turns out to be a lot of what you call meltdowns, but they don't feel like meltdowns. They feel like I'm living with a totally self-absorbed person who writes this stuff for a bunch of complete strangers. And it's supposed to be a big adventure, but it's not. It's our life. It's our marriage, and here in this room it doesn't feel like an adventure. It feels like shit!

(1:16:36-1:16:56)

As well as devaluing Julie's project, and cutting off Julie's affirmation of the fulfilment that it brings, Eric implies that the appreciation she expresses for his peripheral input emasculates him, stating, "I am not a saint [...]. And it makes me feel like an asshole every time you say it!" (1:17:03-1:17:11). After this brief, pantomime, to-and-fro, throughout which the couple follow one another around the apartment, Julie slams the kitchen door in Eric's face, prompting him to yell "and do not write about this on your blog!" before storming out. This explosive episode is not depicted in either Powell's blog, or her memoir; the only minor marital conflicts that Powell reports in either pertain to the practicalities of the project, in terms of its expense and the number of dishes produced by the labour, with a single occasion where she snaps at Eric for mocking her commitment to her readers in front of her brother (*Cooking Dangerously*: p. 82). In fact, as Powell explains in the memoir, the blog was originally Eric's idea – which Julie does say in the middle of the argument – suggested to enable her to advance her culinary skills as a potential alternative to the secretarial job she hated (*Cooking Dangerously*: pp. 20-21). As a plot device, this incident resembles "the comedy of remarriage" (Cavell, 1981) most often associated with Romantic Comedies, and their early predecessor, the Women's Film, whereby the "stubborn and headstrong" screwball heroine (Mortimer, 2010: p. 24) is forced to consider the error of her ways before accepting her failings, eventually reconciling with the hero with a greater sense of appreciation and gratitude (see Hollinger, 2012; Mortimer, 2010; Ferris and Young, 2008; et al.). The film further enforces this gendered genre trope, as, after a very brief separation, Eric returns, having read Julie's self-deprecating blog post, quoted above, which her mother deems "uncharacteristically thoughtful" (01:29:21) as a subtle confirmation of Julie's characteristic narcissism and her subsequent improvement. After the argument, Julie moderates her behaviour, becomes mindful not to praise Eric, and is generally calmer and less prone to 'meltdowns' for the remainder of the project, reinforcing the sexist cinematic stereotype of the hysterical heroine who must "learn something [...] about themselves" or "undergo some change" (Cavell, 1981: p. 56). The inclusion of this original episode evinces Ephron's creative license in the adaptive process; but, unlike the auteurial interventions observed in *The*

Diving Bell and the Butterfly and *Being Flynn*, which accentuate the testimonial tone and advance the autobiographical invitation, this insertion impresses Ephron's "signature auteurist stamp" (Hollinger, 2012: p. 230) on the film, which complicates the witnessing agenda and the invitation that the film issues.

The distinctly testimonial tone of Powell's source texts is determined by the self-witnessing agenda implicated in the conception of her blog. Powell's adoption of the blog format immediately installs intimacy, which is predicated on its reciprocal structure, as blogs "are interactive sites for communities that allow users to comment by raising questions, offering the comfort of shared experience, and 'being there' for others" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 183). Powell's first post issues her autobiographical invitation, and outlines the ideological, socioeconomic, existential and creative factors that motivated her project:

The Contender

Government *drone* by day, renegade foodie by night. *Too old for theatre, too young for children, and too bitter for anything else*, Julie Powell was looking for a challenge. And in the Julie/Julia project she found it. Risking her marriage, her job, and her cats' well-being, she has signed on for a deranged assignment. 365 days. 524 recipes. *One girl and a crappy outer-borough kitchen*. How far will it go, no one can say....³⁹

(my italics, *Cooking Dangerously*, 2005: p. 22-3)

In the blog's opening gambit, Powell reveals the context for what is fundamentally an autobiographical act, defining the tenets of her narrative subjectivity as her professional and socioeconomic dissatisfaction, her culinary passion, ageing anxiety, and her consequent cynical disposition (see my italics). These personal details designate the "emplacement" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 42) of Powell's self-reflexive narrative, which is not only geographical, but also culturally situated, as indicative of "the juncture from which self-articulation issues" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 42). Smith and Watson explain that, in life writing, emplacement encompasses the "location" and "position" of the narrative. Firstly, location is "the national, ethnic, racial, gendered, sexual, social, and life-cycle coordinates in which narrators are embedded by virtue of their experiential histories and from which they speak" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 42). And secondly, position "implies the ideological stances – multiple and heteroglossic rather than single and

³⁹ Spelling and grammar are consistent with the source throughout. Any and all irregularities are represented as they appear in the sources.

unified” and the ways in which they are “adopted by a narrator toward self and others” (2010: p. 43). Powell’s first post articulates her unique subjective position and the location from which her narrative emerges, describing how she will navigate the project and her distinctive subjective perspective by plotting the coordinates of identity through her brief description of herself and her circumstances. Powell’s narrative emplacement offers her readers some insight into the context of her autobiographical act, which expedites the testimonial witnessing structure by encouraging emersion. Consequently, Powell’s underlying autobiographical invitation is characterised by the implicit plea for a witness with whom she is willing to share her experience, which underscores the testimonial tone of the project.

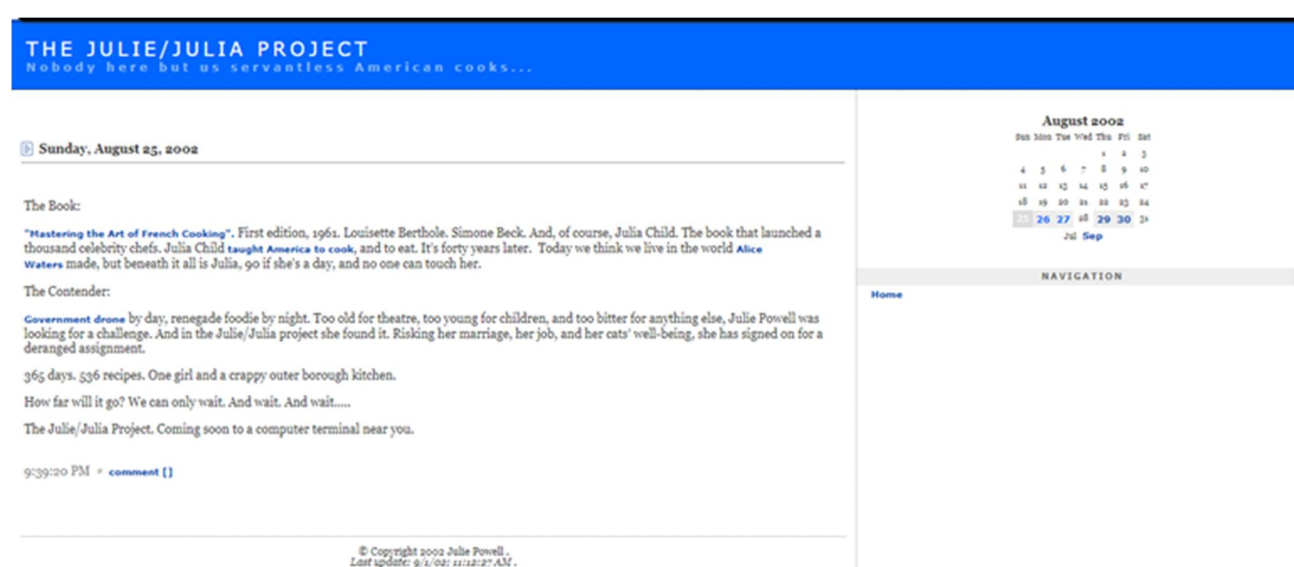


Figure 4.4: Julie Powell’s first blog post.

Significantly, Powell’s first blog entry contains a hyperlink, accessed through the phrase “government drone” (see Figure 4.4), a term loaded with the connotations of mindless industry; once clicked, the reader is redirected to Powell’s employer’s homepage, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation’s website, which outlines the nature of the 9/11 memorial work in which she is engaged. This sublimation communicates the context of cultural trauma, and its bearing on Powell’s everyday life as a key vector of her narrative subjectivity. Powell’s employment places her at the geographical epicentre of the September 11th attacks, which Neil J. Smelser describes as a “quintessentially cultural trauma”, the events of which “were appreciated almost immediately by the American population as perhaps the greatest trauma in the nation’s history” (2004: p. 44). In the epilogue of *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (2004), written just four months after the attacks, Smelser concludes: “Because of their scope, intensity, timing and symbolism, it would be difficult to conceive that [the September 11th attacks] would *not* be traumatic in

nature" (original italics, p. 270). In her blog, Powell identifies herself as "the official voice of the World Trade Center [sic] Memorial Competition" (02/05/03), which determines the historical and socio-political "site" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 69) specific to her autobiographical narrative emplacement. Powell's role involves fielding public submissions relating to a proposed monument at the ground zero site, meaning that her job is inflected with the irony of commemoration; Smelser explains:

To memorialize is to force a memory on us by the conspicuous and continuous physical presence of a monument; at the same time a memorial also conveys the message that now that we have paid our respects to a trauma, we are now justified in forgetting about it.

(2004: p. 53)

Through her work, Powell is constantly caught between remembering and forgetting the "horrendous event", which exacerbates the "indelible" effects of cultural trauma (Alexander, 2004: p. 1), imposing upon Powell a state of irrevocably traumatised inertia. Powell's physical proximity to the memorial project, and her involvement in its expedition, manifests as what she describes as "secretarial ennui" (11/12/03). Jeffrey Alexander claims, "trauma will be resolved, not only by setting things right in the world, but by setting things right in the self" (2004: p. 5), which adequately describes the self-remaking impetus for Powell's culinary and literary project, as described in the above blog post. Powell's professional life is a significant factor in the emplacement of her autobiographical subjectivity, which incites her to seek a therapeutic outlet outside of her secretarial role in order to address the existential flux she describes in her initial post. The Julie/Julia project offers Powell relief from the perpetual conflict of cultural trauma as a type of coping mechanism, functioning as what Piotr Sztompka describes as an "innovative strategy" for adjustment whereby the irrevocable effects of cultural trauma are accepted, but "people make attempts at creative reshaping of their personal situation within the system, in order to alleviate trauma" (2004: p. 184).

Powell describes her attempt to 'creatively reshape' her 'personal situation' as "trying to make a space for myself in my own life" (Powell in 'Secret Ingredients': 08:08), to eschew the limitations that the post-traumatic 'system' imposed and to process her circumstances in a productive way. In the memoir, Powell writes:

When I thought back to the days Before the Project, I remembered crying on subways, I remembered cubicles, I remembered doctor's appointments and something looming, something with a zero at the end of it. I

remembered the feeling of wandering down an endless hallway lined with locked doors.

(*Cooking Dangerously*: p. 124)

This reflective summary references a complex nexus of personally traumatic circumstances, underscored by cultural trauma, which encompasses Powell's distressing occupation at The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC), her diagnosis of Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS), fear of ageing, and the resultant feeling of existential stasis imposed as the culmination of these anxieties. Powell's narrative emplacement identifies a very specific and significant "moment in history [and] a socio-political space" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 69) from which her autobiographical act emerges as testimony.

The specificity of subjective emplacement, which is appropriately demonstrated in *Being Flynn*, is largely overlooked within *Julie & Julia*, which effectively obscures the testimonial tone and compromises the transposition of Julie Powell's autobiographical invitation. Both Powell and her cinematic counterpart express the desire to reconfigure their lives through their autobiographical act; however, Julie's rationale for doing so is significantly different from Powell's, as evinced in Julie's first post:

The challenge, 365 days. 524 recipes.

The contender, Julie Powell.

Government employee by day, renegade foodie by night, risking her marriage, her job and her cat's well-being, she has signed on for a deranged assignment. How far it will go, no one can say.

(17:38-57)

The oversimplified mission statement offered by Julie in the film suppresses much of the contextual detail provided in Powell's first post, quoted earlier. In the film, Julie dismisses her husband's suggestion that her work could serve as an appropriate topic: "the whole idea of writing a blog is to get away from what I do all day, the way that cooking is a way that I get away from what I do all day" (13:22-28). Though the notion of writing the blog as an "innovative strategy" (Sztopmka, 2004: p. 184) is retained in the film, references to the source content concerning Powell's professional life are immediately ruled out, which limits the testimonial scope of the cinematic adaptation. Instead, Julie's work life is quickly summarised by a montage of telephone calls from distressed and angry patrons to the

LMDC, calls that cause her to feel powerless and frustrated, and even reduce her to sympathetic tears (07:55). The conversations offer a condensed insight into the myriad emotional responses to the World Trade Centre tragedy, and the context of collective cultural trauma it represents. Rather than elaborating upon the impact of her everyday environment, which is a recurrent theme in Powell's blog, Julie's inexorable proximity to the ongoing effects of cultural trauma is swept aside in an early adaptive elision that minimises the traumatic context of Julie's work. At the "ritual cobb salad lunch" (09:00), Julie receives mock, shallow pity from her high-flying girlfriends, Cassie (Vanessa Ferlito), Regina (Casey Wilson), and Annabelle (Jillian Bach), all of whom are seemingly unaffected, and indeed, disinterested in Julie's work, or the effect it has on her wellbeing. The women brag about their financial and professional successes, and complain about their incompetent assistants, before turning their attention to Julie. Cassie asks "so how's your job Julie?", but cuts her off before she can form an answer, firing back "I can only imagine the heartbreak". Regina contributes with "so sad – but not in a bad way", with Cassie adding "painful" as Regina speaks (10:49-10:55). The following mid-close shot of a stricken Julie invites the viewer's empathy, as she struggles to compose herself with an apologetic shake of the head (10:56). Before Julie can speak, Cassie's and Regina's phones ring simultaneously, and they briskly excuse themselves before answering their calls. Julie is given no opportunity to articulate the specificity of her daily struggles, and though framing cues empathic engagement, the 'feeling with' is predicated on Julie's marginalisation instead. This scene centres on Julie's failure to 'fit in' with her contemporaries, who are installed as a successful and self-centred social benchmark. As a result, Julie's friends are posited as "contingent others" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 86) within Julie's cinematic narrative, as their relationships lack the reciprocal empathic channels that can assist with the viewer's empathic engagement with the autobiographical subject as self-witness. When questioned about the lunch scene in an interview, Julie Powell claimed that it was intended to convey Julie's motivation, claiming "It was very necessary to externalise the conflict that Julie Powell was having" (Powell, 2009: 5:43). But, instead of providing an onscreen outlet for the articulation of testimonial context, or a contextual collective with whom Julie can identify, the group dynamic functions as a generic plot device. It serves only to advance the 'fabulous' *Sex and the City* trope of successful ladies who lunch, a stereotype to which Julie fails to conform, as the basis of her existential discontent.

Powell's "[narrative] of crisis" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 219) occurs at the intersection of multiple, inextricable contextual factors; but, the film narrative elides the complexity of the sources' testimonial inflections. Instead, the 'odd-one-out' trope is stretched further in

the film when, in an attempt to legitimate her inclusion within her peer group, Julie agrees to be interviewed for a lifestyle article that one of her lunch companions is writing. Annabelle describes the topic as “Our generation. Turning thirty” (11:26), but the poster in the scene that follows reveals a *New York Times* feature with the title: ‘Is 30 the new 20? Portrait of a Lost Generation’, with large mugshot-style photographs of Julie and three other people. Julie is despondent and defensive, complaining to her friend Helen (Mary Lynn Rajsak) that Annabelle misled her by focusing on her failings and describing her as “a mid-level bureaucrat” (12:08). These scenes outline Julie’s existential discontent, as determined by the related aspects of ageing and a lack of professional fulfilment, both of which are found in the blog and the memoir. Nevertheless, though the autobiographical source texts do highlight Powell’s reluctance to turn thirty, she reflects more deeply upon what she perceives as the personal and biological implications of the milestone in the memoir, alongside her lack of orientation and accomplishment in her career. Powell describes the pressure she feels to have children on the very first page⁴⁰, which she emphasises as an age-related concern pertaining to the fertility issues that PCOS can cause (*Cooking Dangerously*: p. 5). Powell also mentions a conversation with her mother, who drops “the Pushing Thirty bomb” shortly after her 29th birthday (p. 12), before describing the way her ambitions foundered in the years since she moved to New York from Austin. This fear of ageing is also framed as the reason that Powell agrees to take a permanent role at the LMDC, even as she acknowledges and describes at length the distress her temporary position causes (pp. 62-63). *Julia & Julia* repackages and reprioritises the emplacement of Julie’s autobiographical subjectivity into a more accessible and genre-contiguous ageing anxiety that is largely unqualified by anything other than career envy and social detachment.

In *Julia & Julia*, Julie’s dissatisfaction with Annabelle’s article becomes the impetus for her blog project, which is reframed as a response to her misrepresentation as a failed writer and a perpetual temp, encompassed in her complaint “She [Annabelle] left so much out” (12:15). Julie’s reactive and competitive motivation is further implied when, on hearing that Annabelle is starting a self-reflexive blog, she asserts “I could write a blog. I have thoughts” (13:32). Julie’s statement is a double assertion of agency and selfhood, expressing aloud her desire to be narratively signified, but on her own terms. This view accords with feminist autobiography scholar, Susan Friedman’s argument that “alienation from the historically imposed image of the self is what motivates the writing, the creation

⁴⁰ On the first page of the memoir where she refers to herself rather than Julia Child.

of an alternate self in the autobiographical act” (1988: p. 41), which posits autobiographical writing as a remedial narrative strategy. Similarly, Gilmore contends:

For many writers, autobiography’s domain of first-person particularities and peculiarities offers an opportunity to describe their lives and their thoughts about it; to offer, in some cases, corrective readings; and to emerge through writing as an agent of self-representation, a figure, textual to be sure, but seemingly substantial, who can claim ‘I was there’ or ‘I am here’.

(p. 9)

For Julie, the project offers relief from the secretarial stasis of her work life, and an opportunity to prove to Annabelle, and to herself, that she is more than an almost-thirty bureaucrat. But, the removal of the sources’ cultural trauma context, as determined by Powell’s autobiographical emplacement, delimits the testimonial tone of both the project within the film narrative, and consequently, the film’s overall factual integrity.

This simplified conception renders Julie’s narrative little more than contemporary framing for a celebrity biopic, with the additional adaptive caveat that the Julia represented in the film is an idealised caricature within a particular generic setting. As mentioned at the beginning of my analysis, Ephron was uninspired by Powell’s story alone, but Columbia’s idea to combine Powell’s story with Child’s sparked Ephron’s auteurial interest. Ephron’s excitement for the project was linked to the “imaginary relationship” that she felt she had with Julia Child through her own cultural engagement with the celebrity chef (Ephron in *Julie & Julia Featurette*: 2:28), placing a question mark over the auteurbiographical potential for the adaptation in terms of balanced subjective representation. Ephron’s interest in Child, coupled with the adaptive approach to Julie’s representation, confirms the film’s subjective bias, but it is more complex than upfront auteurial favouritism. In a panel interview with the *New York Times* writer Alex Witchel, Nora Ephron, Meryl Streep and Stanley Tucci speculate on the probability of a film like *Julie & Julia* being made in Hollywood at all. When Streep is asked about the films she likes to see in her leisure time, she complains that many of the films at the box office contain “material [that] isn’t worth it” (‘TimesTalks’: 42:08), suggesting that fault lies with the commercial drive of Hollywood studios rather than with writers, claiming “writers can’t get the stuff bankrolled, I guess” (42:29). Streep levels that the successful production of *Julie & Julia* was “flukey” (43:02), citing the commercial successes of *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) and *Mama Mia!* (2008) as incentives that “gave the studio a lot of confidence” (42:47). The audience’s laughter at this point in the interview acknowledges the implicature in Streep’s statement, with

reference to Hollywood's institutional marginalisation of female-led films and the inferior bankability of female stars. Tucci confirms that "the timing was perfect" for a film like *Julie & Julia* with Streep in a lead role, as "Meryl's stock had climbed" (43:23) as a result of her recent box office success. Ephron agrees that Streep's star status was instrumental in enabling her to "make this movie about Julia Child" (43:30). What becomes clear in this interview, primarily, is that the film is being promoted as a Streep/Ephron film, with neither Amy Adams who plays Julie, nor Julie Powell present for the discussion. Furthermore, the successful production of *Julie & Julia* is attributed to the leveraging of Streep's prominent and timely star status and bankability, which inevitably invigorates interest in an otherwise uncommercial figure like Julia Child.

Julie & Julia is essentially "two movies rolled into one" (Mark in 'Secret Ingredients': 21:24); the patriarchal construction of Hollywood all but forecloses the notion of either subject's experience being adapted for the big screen alone. Consequently, *Julie & Julia*'s relational alignment is as integral to the film's production as implicit relationality is to Powell's auto/biographical self-witnessing. The film conveys Julia's important aspirational role within Julie's relational and remedial autobiographical act, stylistically emphasising their similarities and shared passions as important to Julie's self-understanding. However, Ephron's hard-won auteurial signature is difficult to overlook within the gendered context of the commercial chick flick, which compromises the testimonial tone of the adaptation through the elision and reduction of significant contextual framing. Julie Powell's autobiographical invitation remains visible, albeit abridged and appended with the generic melodrama of a commercial chick flick, both of which invite empathic engagement but preclude testimonial witnessing. But, the film's inevitable subjective bias, predicated on Streep's star status and Julia Child's celebrity, renders Powell's self-witnessing story contemporary framing for an Ephron/Streep film that enables the cinematic depiction of Julia Child – at the right time. Ultimately, the expectations and limitations imposed by the commercial drive of Hollywood dictate that the subjective truth of female experience is not bankable enough to warrant ethical and empathic witnessing in the mainstream, and these limitations reveal the gendered and generic limits of cinematic I-witnessing.

Auteurbiography or Bourgeois Biopic?

Auteurbiographical adaptations of auto/biography entail additional referential responsibilities that extend the testimonial agenda of factual integrity to significant, related others. The process requires a faithful transposition of the source memoir's relational structure, which conveys the ways in which the relational other is embedded within both the experience and the context of the subject's self-witnessing narrative. In

Being Flynn, Weitz preserves the explicit relational structure of *Suck City* to privilege and reissue Nick Flynn's intimate, autobiographical invitation and transpose the testimonial tone of the source. Weitz achieves this by citing Jonathan Flynn's voice through an oscillating narrative structure that makes Nick's narrative authority clear, but also demonstrates the tracks of empathy that emerge through the father and son's shared emplacement. In *Julie & Julia*, Ephron simplifies Julie Powell's autobiographical invitation by eliding the cultural trauma found in the blog and memoir sources, choosing instead to emphasise Julie and Julia's relational alignment as determined by their relationships and food. This reinterpretation of *Cooking Dangerously*'s implicit relational structure renders Julie's narrative a contemporary frame for a bourgeoisie biopic, which emphasises the gendered generic tropes for which Ephron is renowned in the Hollywood arena. When analysed comparatively, the two films in this chapter illustrate the necessity for factual integrity in the auteurbiographical approach to adaptation, as the ethical and empathic commitment to faithful representation that can convene cinematic I-witnessing's testimonial witnessing structure. Tonal deviations and the reappropriation of relationality inevitably affect the transmission of the subject's invitation, which impedes the viewer's requisite reconciliation of the filmic narrative with the experiential reality of subject's testimonial truth.

The expectations and limitations imposed upon the auteur by the mainstream, Hollywood context of production can have a substantial impact upon an adaptation's testimonial potential. The seven-year development of Weitz's screenplay was largely attributed to ongoing studio input, which led to a version that Flynn deemed "unrecognisable" (Flynn, 2013: p. 81) when compared to Weitz's first draft. De Niro stayed with the project and Focus eventually approved the version that became *Being Flynn*, which closely resembled Weitz's original draft, and Flynn was involved in the adaptive process throughout. The result of Weitz's auteurial and factual integrity is a successful auteurbiographical adaptation that functions as a faithful secondary testimony within the continuum of cinematic I-witnessing. The production of *Julie & Julia*, however, was studio-led from the beginning; Columbia approached Ephron with both the rights and the concept for combining Powell's story with Child's, with a view to capitalising on Ephron's auteurial credibility and Streep's timely stardom. Powell's involvement was limited to an initial meeting with Ephron to discuss the blog and the memoir, and a single set visit during filming, whilst research into the late Julia Child was extensive, including consultations with her family, trips to France, and the auteurial équipe's collective engagement with the *mise en abyme* of available source texts. The unbalanced, adaptive approach, coupled with Streep's star status and Ephron's auteurist signature, skews the focus of the film, meaning

Powell's story is overwhelmed by the multiple authorities that permeate the production. Though some aspects of Powell's reality are retained, *Julie & Julia* is primarily a commercial Colombia-Streep-Ephron collaboration that capitalises on the contemporaneity of Powell's project to depict a well-known figure for profit.

Auteurbiography is predicated on factual integrity, which entails a willing, ethical and empathic engagement with a self-witnessing narrative, and its faithful adaptation to film. Though the relationality of auto/biographical narratives increases referential responsibility, it is possible to preserve the relational structure whilst privileging the subject's testimonial truth. An adaptation's status as secondary testimony within the continuum of cinematic I-witnessing is determined by the faithful transposition of tone, intimacy, and the autobiographical invitation, the combination of which provides insight into the reality of a subject's lived experience. When adaptation involves deviation, the testimonial witnessing structure breaks down, and the testimonial transaction between the real subject and the viewer as witness is disengaged. As explained in previous chapters, the notion of multiple authors in autobiographical and testimonial texts, along with a certain amount of artistic license, can be overlooked. But, cinematic I-witnessing, like testimony, requires a reciprocal willingness to apprehend the truth of a life, which must inevitably remain subjective.

Each testimony changes and brings a different focus to the genre.

Robert Eaglestone

Contemporary Cinematic I-Witnessing – To What Ends?

Contemporary Cinematic I-Witnessing's dialogic proposition is predicated on an intersubjective pact between a subject and a viewer, whereby the subject invites the viewer to bear witness to the testimonial truth of autobiographical experience, and willing, ethical, and empathic viewership equates to acceptance of their invitation. Accordingly, the self-made and self-reflexive films analysed in Section One of this thesis constitute self-witnessing (autofilmic testimony), whilst the adaptations in Section Two function as secondary testimony (auteurbiography), as audiovisual "narratives of witness" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 133) that show and tell an autobiographical subject's testimonial truth. In autobiographical and testimonial texts, these truths emerge through narrative negotiations with "the sources and dynamic processes of autobiographical subjectivity" (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 21), which necessarily encompass representations of the social, historical and cultural discourses through which the subject comes to understand – and narrate – selfhood. Films possess a particular proficiency for the depiction of subjectivity within these diverse and interrelated contexts, using visual media to reduce the referential labour required in order to reconcile experiential narratives as real. Consequently, the representative reality of the autobiographical experience on film, and the codes and conventions that assert the first-person subjective perspective, instantiate an intersubjective witnessing structure that equates viewership with testimonial witnessing.

The films analysed in this thesis demonstrate the cinematic approaches used to issue the autobiographical invitation, as determined by the first-person, subjective perspective they seek to convey. The ways in which films assert this subjective perspective are related to the depiction of the autobiographical 'I', which is realised on screen through narrative strategies that can signify point-of-view and voice, as representative of the embodied subject. In Chapter One, Kim Ki-duk and Jonathan Caouette take advantage of documentary practices, as filmmaker-subjects who construct and literally occupy the narrative frame to provide unified, yet diachronic accounts of autobiographical experience. Similarly, Jennifer Fox and Marjane Satrapi produce their autofilmic testimonies with the inherent narrative authority of author-subjects in Chapter Two; however, they depict self-witness in narrative films in order to offer their autobiographical invitations through multiply embodied and discursive interactions between temporally distinct iterations of the narrating and experiencing 'I's. Derek Jarman's *Blue*, by contrast, refuses the image of the embodied subject, instead harnessing the referential power of the voice and self-reflexive

language to encourage emersive engagement with his autobiographical narrative of self-witness. The films in Section One use multiple performative strategies to represent embodied subjectivity, which not only attest to autobiographical experience, but also invite the viewer to bear witness to the process of self-witnessing itself.

The emersive viewership engendered by the autobiographical invitation encourages the viewer to reconcile the autobiographical 'I' on screen with the real autobiographical subject outside of the text, along with the real-world context in which their narrative was formed. With the exception of *Blue*, the films in this thesis seek to reduce the referential labour involved in emersive viewership, by bringing the real-world testimonial context, to varying degrees, into the cinematic discourse. In Section One, the films manifest a dual offer of seeing and hearing, which allows the subjects to represent the unrepresentable conditions that determine traumatic experience, and to articulate the existential struggle that self-witnessing aims to resolve. In *Arirang*, Kim adopts a pragmatic, if performative, approach, using confessional monologues to describe the past events that led to his creative and existential inertia. Caouette introduces multimedial artefacts of memory to show the familial and relational context of his self-formation, with photos, home-videos and other intertextual footage integrated into the audiovisual narrative to convey the significant influence of these contextual factors. In *The Tale*, Fox uses a parallel spatiotemporal narrative structure to oscillate between the depiction of the circumstances of her childhood sexual abuse, and the belated memory-work of exploration and reconciliation. Satrapi redeploys the graphic imagery of her comic memoir in the animated *Persepolis*, to draw out the historical and ideological framing of cultural trauma as context for collective identity. Like Fox, Satrapi's narrative oscillates between showing the past and evaluating its impact in the diegetic present, to communicate the process of existential reconciliation that self-witnessing entails. For Jarman, the testimonial context remains integral to his self-witnessing narrative, but he purposely prompts the viewer to "shuttle" between the film text and its metanarrative context (Felman and Laub, 1992: p. xv) to make a personal, political statement. On the whole, the films in Section One highlight the importance of contextual framing to both the production and process of self-witnessing, whereby the representation and mediation of autobiographical experience is intended to create an intimate textual space for ethical and empathic witnessing.

The films in Section Two develop the Cinematic I-Witnessing paradigm, by adapting the autobiographical invitation through intertextual, transmedial projects that are underwritten by a commitment to factual integrity. Accordingly, auteurbiographical adaptations require an extensive and emersive engagement with literary narratives of self-witness, which also entails comprehensive, biographical research. The auteur – and by extension, the

auteurial équip  – aim to represent, and re-present the intimate testimonial narrative of a real subject, whereby the adapted film reissues the subject’s autobiographical invitation as secondary testimony. To achieve this, the films in Section Two largely preserve and transpose the tone and intimacy of their literary sources, using cinematic media to recreate and reconstruct the “dimensions of autobiographical subjectivity” (Smith and Watson, 2010: p. 63). In Chapter Three, the analysis reveals the ethical, empathic, and cooperative labour involved in the auteurbiographical adaptation of *The Diving Bell*. The film is focused on the late Jean-Dominique Bauby’s experience of Locked-In Syndrome, which brings into relief the embodied experience of vulnerable subjectivity. As with the autofilmic testimonies in Section One, *The Diving Bell* uses recognisable subjective conventions to convey Bauby’s first-person perspective on screen; but, drawing a parallel with Jarman’s *Blue*, the film initially withholds the image of the subject to privilege embodied experience, and to emphasise the cognitive and imaginative aspects of self-witnessing that the source narrative foregrounds. Through an evaluation of the distinct discursal levels of the adaptive process – the source memoir, the adapted screenplay, and the film – Chapter Three emphasises the importance of fidelity in auteurbiographical adaptations, beyond the reductive, logocentric purview of fidelity criticism. Instead, the analysis draws attention to the ethical implications of empathic engagement, and the risks of deviation, as related to the testimonial imperative at the heart of the adaptive endeavour.

In Chapter Four, Weitz’s *Being Flynn* and Ephron’s *Julie & Julia* reveal and test the limits of auteurbiographical adaptation, to demonstrate the additional expectations and limitations imposed by auto/biographical narratives adapted within the mainstream, Hollywood arena. Though both films install oscillating narrative structures to articulate relationality, and provide recognisable on-screen iterations of the autobiographical invitation, the comparative analytical approach brings to the fore the commercial, gendered and generic boundaries that problematise factual integrity. *Being Flynn* asserts Nick Flynn’s requisite subjective focus and narrative authority in spite of its explicit relational structure, which embeds Jonathan Flynn’s voice through citation, so conveyed by hierarchical narrative strategies. By contrast, *Julie & Julia* interrogates the testimonial agenda of auteurbiography, using Julie Powell’s memoir and blog project as contemporary framing for Julia Child’s cinematic biography. The disparity between the seemingly similar auto/biographical films’ testimonial efficacy is determined by issues of fidelity and ownership, which affect the intersubjective invitation to ‘feel with’ the real subject. Fidelity pertains to both the manner by which the autobiographical subject establishes the intimate tone of the text, in terms of the way they present and share experiential truth, and the

contextual couching of the self-witnessing narrative, which encompasses the occasional and locational aspects of emplacement. The elision of, or deviation from, these determinate dimensions of subjectivity alters the autobiographical invitation to testimonial witnessing, which can obscure and even preclude the emersive viewership that can reconcile the represented experience as real. Ownership, as a related concern, is often conceived as synonymous with authorship, both of which are inevitably complicated by the collaborative industry of adaptation. The mainstream, Hollywood context intensifies issues of authorship, because the adapted film becomes inscribed with the multiple ‘signatures’ of the creative authorities involved in production. The generic identity of the auteur, coupled with the intertextual stardom of the actors, can compromise the necessary privileging of the subject within the film; furthermore, the studios that commission and ultimately control the production and distribution of these films do so with specifically commercial – and financial – goals in mind. Though creative and interpretive contributions throughout the adaptive process can buttress auteurbiographical adaptations’ testimonial efficacy, as seen in *The Diving Bell* and *Being Flynn*, auteurbiographies must always place the “subjective signature” (Schmitt, 2017: p. 150) at the forefront, to lead the viewer “directly *back to life*” (original italics, Schmitt, 2017: p. 117) as experienced and subsequently narrated by the real subject as testimonial truth.

The conclusions I draw in Chapter Four indicate that *Julie & Julia* more closely resembles a biopic, given the commercial and auteurial interventions that delimit the testimonial tone. The recognisable characterisation of a public figure such as Julia Child, when considered within a broad and accessible cultural oeuvre, offers clear possibilities for viewer empathy and engagement with the real subject, as demonstrated in Julie Powell’s project and subsequent memoir. As an evaluation of the representation of autobiographical subjectivity on screen, a more detailed exploration of the ethics and empathic potential of biopics is beyond the scope of this project. However, many of the observations I make regarding the metacritical approach to adaptation and the faithful representation of auto/biographical subjects may assist in future research into biopics, which remain at the fringes of academic criticism.

The notion of ‘feeling with’ real subjects through films is complex, and my analysis illustrates the multiple processes involved in identifying the empathic potential of a cinematic text. Cinematic media capitalise on precognitive, phenomenological and neurological impulses, to maximise the affect potential of the narratives depicted. In autofilmic testimony and auteurbiography, the ethics of feeling are heightened by the non-fictional status of the experiential narrative, which is further intensified by the traumatic contexts that testimonial narratives introduce. Robert Eaglestone argues:

Testimony aims to prohibit identification on epistemological grounds (a reader really cannot become, or become identified, with the narrator of a testimony: any such identification is [an] illusion) and on ethical grounds (a reader should not become identified with a narrator of a testimony, as it reduces and 'normalizes' or consumes the otherness of a narrator's experience and the illusion that such an identification creates is possibly pernicious). Testimony, then, is a genre which displays a paradoxical 'doubleness': the form leads to identification while the content and surrounding material lead away from it.

(2002: p. 118-9)

However, as explained in the introduction, and as becomes clear throughout this thesis, making a distinction between empathy – as a cognate emotional response – and identification – as a reactionary attempt to imagine how the subject feels – can resolve this epistemological and ethical quandary. The films in this thesis encourage empathic relation at a textual remove, by asking the viewer to bear witness to testimonial truth as determined by the personal and partial autobiographical accounts shared. Designating the viewer as witness is an attempt to recognise the ethical imperatives that testimonial narratives inherently invoke.

Cinematic I-Witnessing draws attention to what testimony does for the subject, and in seeking to define the formal and generic distinctions of testimonial subjectivity on screen, I emphasise the reconciliatory, therapeutic and cathartic tropes of self-witness in film as related to creative assertions of agency. Though recurrent themes and conventions emerge, the most significant similarities pertain to the confessional and cathartic qualities that the testimonial narratives share, which signal the therapeutic and reconciliatory remit of the self-witnessing process more broadly. Consequently, the testimonial function of the films in this thesis is not necessarily confirmed nor determined by ethical and empathic engagement; rather, the viewer's willingness to engage in testimonial witnessing attests to their desire to participate, however vicariously, in the exploratory and reconciliatory process.

As indicated in Chapter Two, "opening to the trauma of others facilitates opening to one's own", and likewise, "being open to one's own trauma is necessary in order to be open to that of another" (Atkinson and Richardson, 2013: p. 3). Fox's self-witnessing process led her into situations of reciprocal witnessing, whereby she was able to elicit testimonial telling through the revelation of her own traumatic truth. Fox explicitly seeks to perpetuate this testimonial reciprocity through her film, mobilised by the outreach screenings she

authorises in partnership with her distributor, HBO. Fox's advocacy move comes at a time when cultural attitudes to testimonial disclosure are shifting, in response to recent collective movements such as #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter. The visibility and authority of self-witnessing across these new modes and platforms for testimonial exchange is fundamental to the perpetuation of engagement, which can in turn forge new testimonial territories for therapeutic practices.

The perspective taking and associated emotional rehearsal afforded by viewing autofilmic testimonies and auteurbiographies have practical and theoretical implications for Cinematherapy, which is used as a complementary tool in psychotherapeutic settings. Cinematherapy is by no means new, with Charles R. O'Brien and Josephine L. Johnson offering an introductory perspective over forty years ago. In their article, simply entitled 'Cinema Therapy' (1976), O'Brien and Johnson describe the practical applications for film viewership in counselling contexts, as related to films' ability "to stimulate the thoughts, responses, and behaviors necessary for counselees to live productive lives" (1976: p. 42). O'Brien and Johnson outline eight specific "uses" for films as therapy, with the first citing empathy as "crucial" (1976: p. 40). The remainder of the proposed uses primarily point the potential models for problem-solving, catharsis, and the exploration of emotions and "the dimensions of life" (p. 40). O'Brien and Johnson align Cinematherapy with Bibliotherapy, which, at the time their article was written, was theorised as engagement with literature as an "opportunity to learn to know oneself better, to understand human behaviour [and] to find interests outside of the self" (Edwards, 1972: p. 213). In the years since O'Brien and Johnson's article was published, Bibliotherapy has amassed substantial scholarly attention for its applications in trauma counselling and therapy (Hynes, 2019; Glavin and Montgomery, 2017; Stewart and Ames, 2014; McCulliss, 2012; Malchiodi and Ginns-Gruenberg, 2008; Pehrson and McMillen, 2005; et al.), with a noteworthy surge in the academic literature in the last ten years that is largely focused on its applications for children (Catalano, 2017; De Vries, et al., 2017; Robinson, 2012; et al.). By contrast, Cinematherapy remains under-theorised,⁴¹ with only a handful of noteworthy studies that discuss its use in psychotherapeutic settings (Schulenberg, 2003; Sharp, Smith, and Cole, 2002; Hesley and Hesley, 2001; Newton, 1995; Berg-Cross, Jennings and Baruch, 1990). Even this available literature neglects to consider the use of autobiographical and testimonial films, specifically, favouring commercial, fictional films for the metaphorical insights they offer. For Janet Sharp, et al., viewing films can offer therapeutic benefits as a "useful adjunct to more traditional approaches to therapeutic change" (2002), but they too

⁴¹ A sizeable list of anecdotal and specialised/genre-specific literature on the applications and efficacies of cinematherapy are available via cinematherapy.com.

argue that the films selected should be “relevant on a metaphorical level rather than in terms of literal content”, drawing on empirical studies from the related field of bibliotherapy to describe the resistance clients can exhibit when engaging texts that explore issues too similar to their own (2002: p. 272). Sharp and her colleagues do, however, point out that further empirical studies on the direct applications and benefits of cinematherapy are required, a view that Stefan F. Schulenberg (2003), and I, wholeheartedly share.

There is also scant empirical data pertaining to empathic engagement with autobiographical and testimonial narratives, or with non-fictional narratives more broadly. Narratology and empathy scholar Suzanne Keen attests that further work is needed in terms of the ways in which narrative strategies of empathy function in non-fictional texts (in Hühn, et al., 2013). In connection with the apparent gaps in both the Cinematherapy and empathy scholarship, I propose that Cinematic I-Witnessing could offer some insight into theorising the intersection of both, with further interdisciplinary potential in the related fields of life writing, the medical humanities, psychology, sociology, and film.

Many of the scholars with whom I have engaged throughout this thesis have sought to characterise the contemporary cultural landscape in line with the ubiquity of subjective and testimonial narratives. These figures have mapped an interdisciplinary framework through which the ongoing evaluation of lives and their experiential narratives can offer insight into contemporary concerns. As we approached the turn of the century, Felman and Laub declared “the age of testimony” (1992: p. 53), as they catalogued the many belated accounts of Holocaust survival through their video archives. The ‘memoir boom’ straddled the arrival of the twenty-first century, and shortly thereafter Leigh Gilmore observed that “the age of memoir and the age of trauma may have coincided” (2001: p. 6). In the second edition of *Reading Autobiography: A Guide to Interpreting Life Narratives* (2010), Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson elaborated upon their extensive pedagogical handbook, to address the paradigmatic evolution of digital, relational and multimedial self-reflexive forms. As noted in my introduction, the most recent developments in self-representational practices are indicative of a “visual turn” (Tamboukou, 2017), which is emerging alongside a marked shift in attitudes toward testimonial telling and the platforms of bearing witness. At this juncture, empathy is entering the critical discourse of autobiography and documentary studies, in attempts to reconcile subjective narratives with experiential reality. In theorising Contemporary Cinematic I-Witnessing, I draw upon – and draw together – the definitive academic approaches to subjectivity, to identify the ways in which testimonial showing and telling converge on screen. In so doing, I bear witness to the processes, products, and people who willingly share the subjective truth of a life.

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